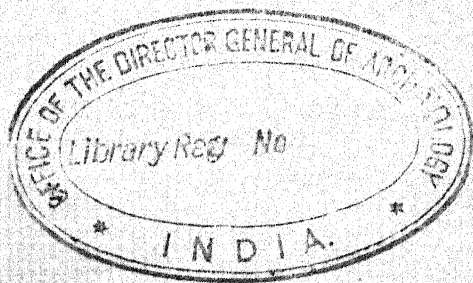




V 89

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT



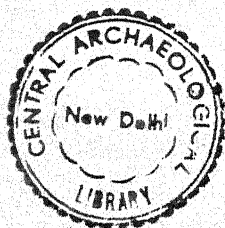
PRINTED BY M. N. PANDEY AT THE ALLAHABAD
LAW JOURNAL PRESS, ALLAHABAD

PUBLISHED BY R. L. WASON, TIMES PUBLISHING
COMPANY LTD., LAHORE

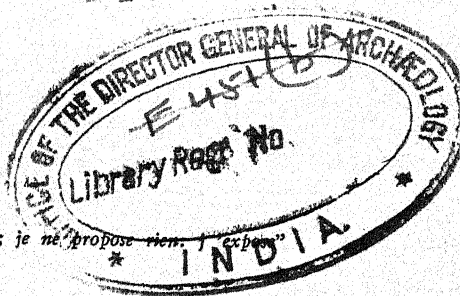
The Prophet of the Desert

By

KHALID L. GAUBA



14532



"Je n' impose rien; je ne propose rien." *exhib.*

~~E 451 (B)~~

922.97
Muh/Gau

34/34

THE TIMES PUBLISHING CO., LTD.
LAHORE [INDIA]

1934

CENTRAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL
LIBRARY, NEW DELHI.

Acc. No.....14532.....

Date.....29.5.1961.....

Call No.....922.97 / Muh / Gan

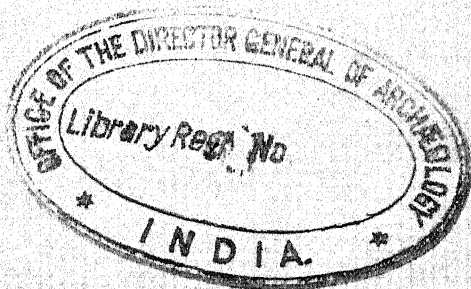
The Standard Book Dep't Lahore P.S. - 2/2/12

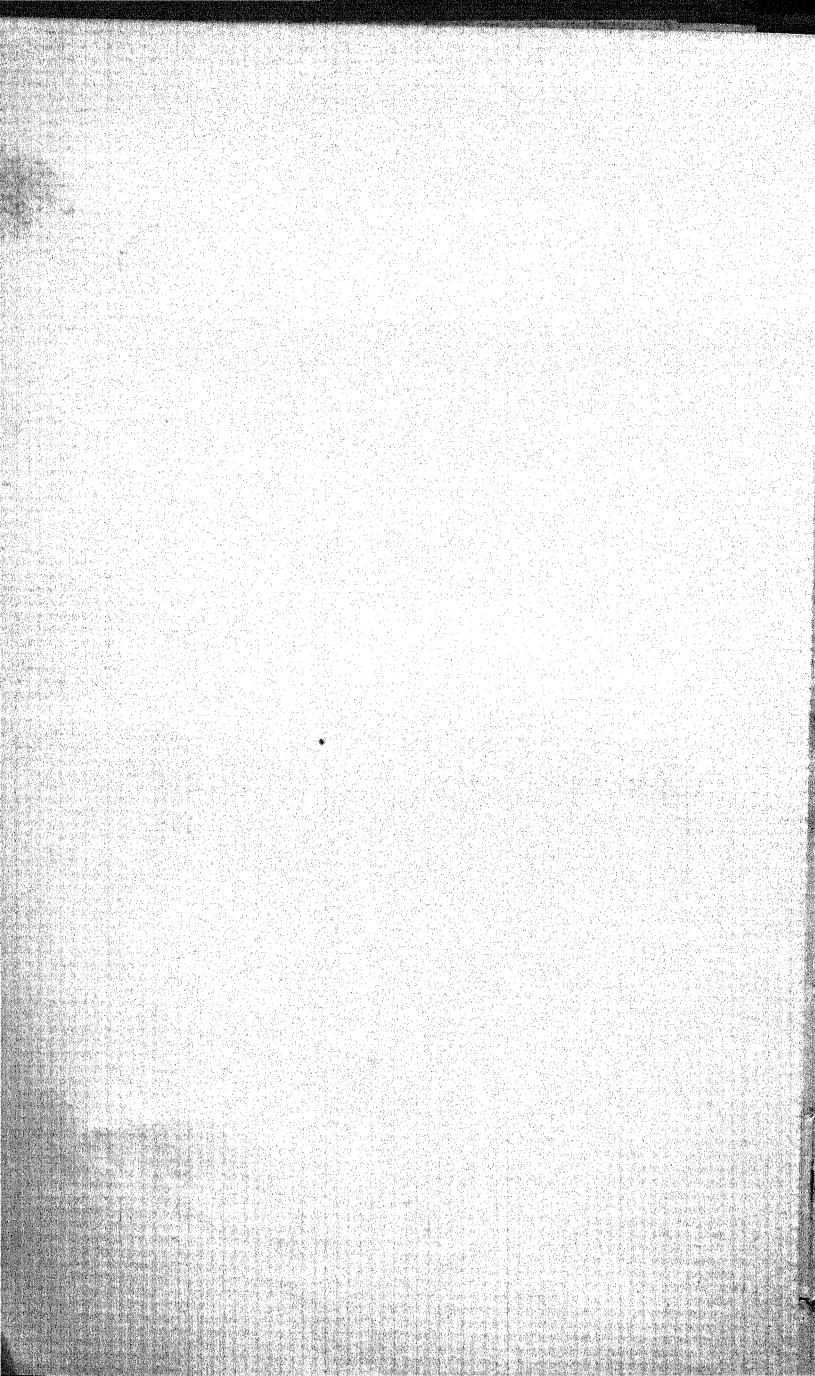
To
Husnara And Our Children



CONTENTS

	PAGE
Prologue	ix
CAMEL DRIVER	1
PROPHET	32
FUGITIVE	99
REFORMER	137
WARRIOR	204
CONQUEROR	238
MAN	298
Author's Acknowledgments	331
Chronological Table	335





PROLOGUE

Since our first parents went astray in the Garden of Eden, mankind has required assistance in keeping to the path of virtue. This assistance has been forthcoming from the Prophets, who have appeared from time to time. They have not all been agreed as to the means or the end; but, with one exception, they have based their claims to recognition on their degrees of intimacy with the Omnipotent,—an 'Only Son', through whom sinners can obtain redemption; a 'Friend' who can put in a good word for those who believe in his mission; one or two 'Companions', who have several opportunities to intercede; and not a few 'Incarnations' who could decide matters on the spot.

There has only been one, among this exalted species of mankind, entirely eccentric in his claims, which include no suggestion as to confidence, relationship or intimacy with the Supreme. This "eccentric" Prophet was Muhammad of Arabia.

To write the life, in the strict sense of the word, of any of the earlier Prophets is almost

impossible. Apart from the problem of knowing what manner of men they were, scholars differ widely on such elemental particulars as to when precisely they appeared and disappeared;—the margins of error, in many cases, varying between a hundred and a thousand years. The absence of historical record, therefore, in most cases makes fact indistinguishable from fable and tradition. Of Jesus Christ, the most recent and important of the Prophets before Muhammad, we have only the records of about four years of his life.

In many ways a biographer of the Prophet Muhammad is at greater disadvantage than the biographer of any other Prophet, for he is closely tied to an abundance of accurate historical material, any divergence from which would occasion the severest reprobation. Speculation must, therefore, be severely confined to the very few gaps in the story. But the difficulties of the biographer are amply counterbalanced by the happy advantage of the reader, who is able to detach himself from the narrative, to go to the sources of information and to judge the man and his work in their pristine purity. One need not, therefore, accept this or that particular version; from the vast mass of authentic material one can reconstruct the picture of Muham-

mad's life, the times in which he lived and the value of the work he accomplished.

Muhammad's life story, like that of many another great man, is unfortunately enshrined in impressive volumes, which more people look at than read. An attempt has been made in the present book to offer the average reader, in becoming brevity, all the salient incidents and features of the life and work of the Prophet of Islam, without, on the one hand, any taint of missionary or ecclesiastical objective, and, on the other, free from the deliberate misrepresentations common to Muhammad's Christian biographers. The author's venture may, therefore, be summarised as a plain book, by a plain man, for plain people. It is an attempt to take the reader back to the original, to make him a contemporary of the incidents depicted and, if possible, to share the most memorable events of Muhammad's amazing career, much as they happened and to understand the view-points of the people of his day. When the reader has come to the end, he will better be able to form his own opinion on many matters of interest.

Islam and Muhammad its Prophet have suffered much by calumny and misrepresentation, which continue up to the present day, inspired largely by a historical back-ground,

such as the exploits of the Saladin, the fiasco of the Crusades, the death of General Gordon, the Moghul Empire, and Mustafa Kamal Pasha's smoking reply to the Treaty of Sevres. So long as Islam is living force in the material World, it seems hopeless to expect non-Muslim opinion in general to take a dispassionate view of the contribution of Islam and Muhammad to the solution of many social and political problems. It would, of course, be equally intelligent to misrepresent Jesus Christ on account of Belgian colonisation in the Congo, or Moses for the Zionite activities of the League of Nations, or Buddha for the Sino-Japanese Wars. The difference, however, seems to lie in this, that whereas Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism have ceased to reckon in the material World, Islam is still a tremendous force and, accordingly, inspires the perfidy of the Balkans, the hate of the Jews, the apprehensions of the Hindus and the animosity of Russia.

Among the major problems, which confront the World today, the most important are those relating to nationalism and internationalism, the mingling of the sexes and the breakdown of the marriage relationship, the conflict of autocracy and democracy, capital and labour, the rejection of God by great multitudes of

people, empty churches and starving missions. This is not the first time in history that man has been tired of God or been confronted by major problems in menacing array. It appears more than mere accident that Europe and America should now be eagerly debating the pros and cons of polygamy, easier divorce, distribution of the wealth of great families by more equitable rules of inheritance, brotherhood among different peoples, elimination of prejudices of class and colour, collapse of the economic system as a result of the borrowing and lending of money at interest. Almost identical questions were before the World towards the close of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh centuries. A perusal of the pages of the book will show how a simple Camel Driver led his caravan through these difficulties.

This book is, therefore, offered to the non-Muslim as much as to the Muslim, to the believer in God as to the agnostic, to the bishop as to the sinner, to the Capitalist as to the Socialist, to the Imperialist as to the Democrat, to the man who is regular in worship as much as to the man, who never says his prayers. And, therefore, it is the Author's earnest hope that the reader, whatever his views of Life and Death, whether he expects to sit upon a cloud

singing hymns or roast in the fires of Hell, or be decomposed into a million atoms, electrons and alpha particles, or transmigrate through beast and insect to ultimate happiness, whether he wants to be eventually buried, incinerated or eaten by vultures, he will find, within these pages, a stirring account of a common man, who found and divulged much happiness around him and to the generations that have succeeded him.

CHAPTER I

CAMEL DRIVER

The crimson disk, as it sinks beyond the sands into the sea, has spread the sky like a cloth of gold. The hills are dyed in rainbow flames.

An imposing caravan comes to the crest of the pass that conducts the road from Yathreb to the valley of Mecca. It is clear at a glance that it is no mere trading caravan. From the richness of the trappings, the mannerism of fine steeds, the throng of well-laden camels with their appurtenances of bright palanquins, it is evident beyond doubt that some Arab chieftain is on his way to Mecca on a festal mission.

In a wide court-yard of the city a blazing fire rises in spirals to meet the deepening purples of evening. There is the sound of music and laughter; a great feast is in progress. Guests are arriving singly, in groups, and in caravans, for seldom is so important an occasion in the line of these fierce sons of the desert.

The guests gather round the fire to eat their fill of the ample fare of Arab hospitality.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Great salvers of rice and lamb, numberless bowls of meat in various appetizing forms, cups of peppered coffee and glasses of green tea, hot and strong. There are over two hundred guests of all ages and ranks, from the tribal Sheikhs to the roving Bedouins, from city officials to more humble tradesmen; so too the great men of the Quraish, captains of the army and eloquent preachers from the temples of Hobal. Their smocks make a medleyed splash of colour, —red, blue, orange and yellow. Sashes of contrasting shades are drawn wide over the hips and tied in fantastic knots in front or at the side. There are impressive headdresses, distinguishing warriors from the followers of urban pursuits.

It is as distinguished a gathering as Mecca can assemble, for the host Abdul Muttalib is the steward of the Temple of the Ka'ba, an office which is regarded as one of the most important in Arabia. To-night Abdul Muttalib is all smiles. He is in his happiest mood, moving here and there, attending to the wants of his guests, jesting, laughing, adding to the carefree merriment of the feast. From his stature, and his admirably proportioned figure, it is not difficult to see that he is a prince, even among the princes

CAMEL DRIVER

of the desert. His ability is evident at a glance. The keenness of his eye, the breadth of his brow and a long handsome nose above a firm lipped mouth all tell that he comes of the noblest Arab stock.

"I have named him Muhammad", says Abdul Muttalib, in answer to a question from his guests about a little baby, who is being carried round by a portly black slave.

"Why Muhammad?" they ask, "why not a name from your own illustrious family?" For Abdul Muttalib can trace a proud descent through Hashim and Abul Manef, Kaleb and Lowa, Ghalib and Mudrika, Nazar and Adnan, Ad and Nabet, Hamal and Kaidar, to Ishmael and Abraham.

"Because", says Abdul Muttalib, affectionately stroking a pair of chubby cheeks, "I hope that some day the name, which I have given him, will prove great".

Never have his friends seen Abdul Muttalib happier. He has several sons and daughters, some say eighteen, but of all these Abdullah was his favourite. Indeed, he loved Abdullah so well that like Abraham he had vowed to sacrifice him before the idols of the Ka'ba. Only the chieftains of the Quraish prevented

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

him from offering Abdullah at the altars of his gods. One hundred camels were killed in his place; a number that has since become recognised as the price of the *dia* among the Quraish. In little Muhammad he sees the features and the soft shy eyes of his father. He has called him Muhammad in token of his belief and hope that some day little Abdullah's boy would grow into a great personage among the tribes, and, perhaps, his successor in the stewardship of the Ka'ba.

Long into the night the merry festals ring. Amina hears the music of the drums and the sound of song and laughter. She lies under a limpid sky ablaze with a myriad stars; her thoughts go to another night very much like this, when she was a bride newly wed, a fair gift from the Banu Najjar to the proud Quraish. Only a bare few months ago; now she is a widow. A little baby nestles snugly against her breast; she presses him closer to her. All children are dear, but the fruit of love's first passion are sweetest.

[2]

But Amina's heart is sad; no joy can fill the void left in her life by the gentle and hand-

some Abdullah. Perhaps if Amina could peer into the crystals of the future, she may foresee a great destiny for her precious Muhammad, and be less grieved at her loss. True, his birth has coincided with the discomfiture of Abraha and his forces. Mecca has also heard of the extraordinary manifestations of nature that have synchronized with these times,—of the violent earthquake that has wrecked the four towers of the palace of the Khusrus, the strange star that has been observed to light up the desert, the extinguishing of the sacred fire of the Persians, lit for more than a thousand years, and of Lake Sawa that has run dry all of a sudden.

These events may be no portents at all; they may be just coincidences. The rational historian will, perhaps, smile at our credibility and superstition. But who can say that in these signs there is not the finger of God pointing to the immortal destiny of one ordained to weld the scattered tribes of Arabia into a great empire, and to deliver a message that will be the inspiration of the centuries to come?

Though Mecca knows nothing of Muhammad's destiny, he is, as Abdul Muttalib's grandson, the pride of the Quraish, whose chieftains and warriors make great of him. He is the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

light of Abdul Muttalib's old age, and is often to be seen in his grand-father's arms, playing with his face and shyly hiding himself from strangers. He is also a favourite with his uncles, particularly with Abu Talib and Hamza. Little Muhammad has never known a father's love; the customs of the country rob him soon of a mother's endearing devotion. For a few months his mother has him at her breast; then for a few days Thuwaibiya, a slave girl in Abdul Muttalib's family. According to the custom of the Arabs, when a few months old, he is put into the care of Halima, a Bedouin woman of the tribe of Banu Sa'd. Muhammad now feeds on the milk that nourishes the brave sons of Arabia's wilds.

Abdul Muttalib is at the height of his power. For fifty years, since he succeeded to the stewardship of the temple, he has been the virtual head of the Meccan commonwealth. The government of the city is vested in an oligarchy of ten sherifs recruited from the leading members of the house of the great Kossay, who combined in his personal control all the chief religious and political functions of the city. These offices are now divided under several functionaries, and include the guar-

CAMEL DRIVER

dianship of the keys of the Ka'ba, which is entrusted to the house of Abd-ud-Dar; the superintendence of the wells of Zamzam to the house of Hashim. The civil and criminal magistracy is held by the house of Taym-ibn Murra. Other state duties include the headship of the army and the relations with neighbouring tribes. These portfolios are also held by distinguished members of the Quraish. In spite, however, of this distribution of privilege and power, Abdul Muttalib's age, personal character and influence, confirm his pre-eminence among the chieftains of the state, and incidentally in the whole of Arabia, for Mecca is the *Umm-ul Qura*, or the Mother of the towns of Arabia.

Though Mecca itself lies in a sterile valley, and the city is without cultivation or date-palms, springs, wells, gardens, fruit orchards and green valleys are not far removed. From time immemorial, Mecca has been the focus of the caravan routes of the desert. Spices, incense, hides, fruit and piece-goods; gay shawls and goods in leather from Yemen; ivory tusks from Abyssinia, fair women from Damascus, and slaves from Egypt. But Mecca is also established in a second quality, for not merely is it a commercial centre, but, also a privileged holy

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

of holies, surrounded by an inviolable territory, the *Haram*, or common sanctuary of the Arabs.

The city radiates from the Ka'ba. The houses of the Meccan aristocracy press closely upon its walls. Architecturally the Ka'ba is no attractive monument. It is a rude stone building with bare blank walls. There are no windows, and the light has only the door-way through which to filter in. Tradition maintains that the Ka'ba was raised by Abraham and his son Ishmael to the glory of the one eternal God. Chroniclers place its foundation a thousand years before the temple of Jerusalem and two thousand years before Jesus Christ. The sanctuary takes its name from its shape, for Ka'ba signifies a square. The builders of this shrine had doubtless few architectural problems to solve, their skill being limited to the raising of four straight unornamented walls.

The chief object of veneration in the Ka'ba is a blackstone, a meteorite that fell in the desert several thousand years ago. Surrounding the stone are a multitude of idols, chief among whom is the idol Hobal, a great fat-bellied god, who looks benignantly upon the worshippers, who crowd the Ka'ba at all

hours of the day and night. There are also representative idols of the creeds of the various merchants, who come to Ka'ba from distant lands for the annual fairs in the months of pilgrimage. Among others, there is an image of the Virgin Mary, carrying the infant Jesus. So Christian, Jew and Zoroastrian may find within the Ka'ba the emblems of his faith.

The sanctity of the Ka'ba is recognised throughout the peninsula. The possession of the shrine, therefore, confers upon the Quraish a religious supremacy among the tribes. It also places at their disposal a vast treasure of gold, silver, and jewellery, and collections of valuable offerings of pagan piety. The keys of the temple were originally in the possession of officials appointed by the rulers of Yemen; but the Quraish, having once obtained them, have held them ever-after, successfully repelling every effort, both of their own pagan contemporaries and the invading Christians from Abyssinia under Abraha. So confident are the Quraish that the shrine will never be taken from their stewardship, that when the Christians invested Mecca and seized Abdul Muttalib's camels, the Meccan patriarch was more concerned about the fate of his property

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

than about the safety of the Ka'ba. Thus, when Abdul Muttalib appeared before the Christian Abraha to demand his camels, the latter remarked: "You seem more anxious about your beasts than about the Ka'ba". Abdul Muttalib made reply, "Yes, I worry about my camels, because I am their master; as to the Ka'ba, its Master will look after it Himself".

The temple of the Ka'ba, which Abraha wished to destroy is, therefore, by immemorial tradition, the object of the greatest veneration. It is looked upon as a present from Jehovah to the Arab race. It is the oratory of Abraham and Ishmael, the house of Allah, the sanctuary of three hundred and sixty idols, the pantheon of the nation, the centre of traditions dear to all. It is the place of common pilgrimage. If Arabs unite, it is in one thing,—to adorn the Ka'ba, to beautify it, to enrich it beyond all the monuments of the universe. Sabeans and worshippers of fire send offerings to it; the Jews demonstrate a deep respect; merchants from China and Hindustan pay homage; only the Christians are sullen and jealous.

[3]

The sands of time flow swiftly.

CAMEL DRIVER

The air of Mecca for all its sanctity is not salubrious. Muhammad, who was consigned to the care of Halima, made himself at home, in his wee way, among the Banu Sa'd. Here he has grown like any other baby of the tribe,—at first, tugging at the breasts of his foster mother, and protesting vociferously when there was a shortage of supply; later, smacking his lips upon a stew of locusts or munching a piece of soft bread; playing in the sand and making mud pies like other boys of his age. Dressed in a mere stripped shirt, with bare feet and bare head, unwashed and ill-kept he is undistinguishable from the common children of the village. But Halima loves little Muhammad. To her he is like her own child, who was born much about the same time. Six years is long enough to weave nets of love; and Muhammad has tied firm knots in Halima's heart. She weeps when at last his grandfather sends for him.

Amina finds her Muhammad very different to the helpless mite she handed over to Halima. He is now a small man,—independent, with marked preferences and a will of his own; he makes amusing observations and kisses his mother with tenderness. He is the most precious of her possessions. Muhammad is also

often to be found upon his grand-father's knee, toying with his sword or diving within the recesses of his jerkin. But it is not in his destiny to have his mother or his grand-father long with him.

Abdul Muttalib is required to journey to Sana to convey the congratulations of the Quraish to Saif, the new ruler on the throne of the Tobbas. The journey, however, proves too arduous for a man of his age; and Abdul Muttalib passes away at the age of eighty-two, to the regret of the whole Quraish.

Abdul Muttalib is survived by an ample family of sons, daughters and grand-children. Of these Abdul Uzza is the eldest, mean, selfish and intriguing. His fanaticism is as extensive as his egoism. He believes that he is the natural successor of his father to the stewardship of the Ka'ba. Abu Talib is a distinct contrast to his brother;—he is genial, kind, and wears a frank smile. Level eye brows and a reflective face reveal him as a master statesman, a man of few words, but with much hidden thought. Hamza is young, handsome and brave; there is something of the seer in his eyes, and in his voice a note of the passionate faith that makes martyrs. Abbas might be a philosopher or a divine.

CAMEL DRIVER

Muhammad's share of Abdul Muttalib's inheritance is paltry; and, as he has already lost his mother, he becomes a ward of Abu Talib, his favourite uncle.

Abu Talib, like most of his tribe, is engaged in trade and commerce. In Muhammad he finds an affectionate and entertaining companion for his journeys across the desert. Muhammad is now a growing boy and looks and talks wiser than his age.

[4]

And as the years go by, boy-hood turns to youth and life begins to flower in man-hood.

In Muhammad the traits peculiar to his race have attained sound and conspicuous development. The wanderings across the desert, the long journeys in burning suns and nights of tempest have steeled and strengthened him. In this land of trackless wastes, infested with beasts of prey and wild tribes, who know no law except the law of superior strength, each man is dependent upon his own watchfulness and the keenness of his vision. His safety lies in his own courage and determination, on his skill as a horseman and his dexterity with the sword. Soberly and frugally nourished, Mu-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

hammad's body is spare, but, nevertheless, supple, sinewy and capable of great endurance. And within the hardened frame of his body dwells a spirit of indomitable resolution. The nature of his country and the rough mode of living have saved Muhammad from the excesses of luxury and temptation common to his contemporaries across the Euphrates and Tigris.

Physically Muhammad is a man of average height, his face is round and health bursts from his cheeks. He walks straight and erect; and, with keen eyes, looks the world boldly in the face. His smooth black hair sets off a fair complexion. There is the unmistakable suggestion of the unknown in his eyes.

Abu Talib, who apart from his vocation as a trader is his father's successor in the perfection of the Ka'ba, enjoys great influence among the Quraish and the people of Mecca. Muhammad, as Abu Talib's ward, is known and recognized by the important and distinguished of the city. And as from youth he emerges into manhood, people begin to admire his handsome figure, his fearless look and the grace of fine manners. Brilliant in repartee, truthful to a fault, sincere in the smallest details of life, he has earned the title of '*al-Amin*'

or the honest man.

Muhammad's character is, however, no hothouse product. It has been hewed from nature and shaped by experience. He has travelled widely, and, from the age of fourteen, carried arms for the Quraish. He is, therefore, familiar with many details of life, with profit and loss, with defeat and triumph.

In various expeditions of war and commerce, Muhammad has learnt much of his country and of his race. He has seen the desert with its terrors and its beauty; here, he has heard the legends and understood the traditions of the wandering tribes, and gathered information concerning the world at large; his mind has dwelt upon the distinctions between man and man, Jew and Christian, Mani and Zoroaster. Muhammad finds his country the heart of the known world. But what a fickle and unsettled heart! Arabia is without central authority; the country is divided into a network of warring tribes; and from across the borders come the rumblings of distant thunder. Only within the sacred precincts of Mecca itself is war an exile. Without the *Haram* the tribes extirpate each other in periodic strife. In the eyes of the Byzantium

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

and the Empire of the Khusrus the Arabs are a wholly savage race. Roman historians have referred to them as the *natio perniciosa*, and throughout the civilized world Muhammad finds his race with the unenviable reputation of being neither dependable friends nor reliable enemies. The great empires of the Romans and the Persians only cried halt upon the borders of Arabia for the reason that the rule of the desert promised small return and little thanks.

In the field of Arabian history monarchies have, from time to time, arisen only to perish like mushrooms, no sovereignty enduring for any length of time. The Bedouin has too strong a taste for independence; he is averse even to peaceful enterprizes for his own profit if they call for discipline and subordination. There can be no real administrative efficiency. The decisions of the paterfamilias carry some weight but no coercive authority. Peace is an unpopular intruder. The Arab is sensitive to mockery in prose and verse, but he is accessible to hyperbole and eulogy; small causes often result in big effects. Generally cattle lifting and the use of pasture and wells constitute the major causes of controversy and strife. Blood calls aloud for blood, and the call at times echoes through

generations.

Oldest among the neighbouring monarchies is that of Yemen. Its regal residence was at one time Mareb in the southern most part of the Arabian peninsula. But, after a devastating inundation, the seat of Yemen authority was moved to Sana, where Abraha commenced the construction of a magnificent church about the time of Muhammad's birth, in the interests of which he descended upon Mecca. The Yemenite Kings for centuries have been addressed by the surname of *Tobba*, a word derived from the African and signifying 'powerful.' Next in importance to Yemen stands the subsidiary kingdom of Hira situated to the north-east. The Kings of Hira are a collateral branch of the royal race of Sana, and have governed the kingdom for about four hundred years, paying from time to time uncertain allegiance to their neighbours,—the despots of Persia. Ghassan is the third monarchy towards the north-west, also of ancient origin, and tracing a history five or six centuries old, consisting mainly of flirtatious alliances with its more vigorous neighbours.

While the banners of Yemen, in one form or another, flutter over the length and breadth of

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

the land, the centre of Arabia remains the stronghold of a kindred, though somewhat divergent, race. Unlike the Arabs of the south, the latter have little disposition for architecture, the fine arts or even for agriculture. Their outlook is as wild and lawless as the desert. Their mode of living is pastoral and nomadic. They have infinite subdivisions and ramifications; but, five tribes stand out in prominence. In the centre of the peninsula are the Rabiah, who lay claim to a Yemenite kinsmanship; on the west are the Quraish, who predominate Mecca; on the north are the Kais, the Tamin and the Hawazin.

From a bird's eye view of his country, Muhamîad, therefore, sees first and foremost his own tribe the Quraish with their allies occupying the upper half of the western coast with Mecca as the capital. Next in importance come the countless clans of the centre, who owe no allegiance and pay no tribute; lastly, south, east and north, the relics of the old Yemenite kingdoms of Sana, Hira and Ghassan, half sunk into Persian and Byzantine vassalage, exerting but an enfeebled authority even within their own domains.

The life of the cities is parochial. Each person's interest is centred in his own tribal life;

CAMEL DRIVER

each man's interest is the progress and prosperity of his particular city. Proximate to the cities, the Bedouin dwell in houses of mud and stone leading an elemental existence in the care of their flocks or performing the office of guardians to passing caravans. Beyond the Bedouin lie the parching deserts, impenetrable barriers, where heat surpasses words, when the blind glare of the sky is as brass overhead, and the ground under foot is like iron; when there is neither rest by day nor sleep by night; when throats are dry and tongues loll within the mouth with thirst, where mirages of distant pools mock the vision, and, where miles pile on miles in interminable seas of sand.

[5]

From the Ka'ba set up by Abraham and Ishmael Allah has been deposed; from Mecca he is a fugitive; his place has been usurped by three hundred odd pretenders. Other deities preside in the homes of the people. Some worship angels, the *Benat Allah* or the daughters of God, who are supposed to influence the decisions of their father; others worship the Sun and Moon; practically everybody acknowledges the supremacy of the stars. That the tribes of the desert

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

should pay particular homage to the starry firmament will occasion little wonder. With the refreshing dews of night come out not only Venus in her beauty, Orion in his bespangled girdle and the coy Moon, but the entire splendour of the midnight sky to dazzle the eye and touch the spirit. "High above the silent desert, the tents and slumbering flocks, looking down on the midnight ride and the waiting ambuscade, the stars swing on their glittering way." They are the source of a varied knowledge; they mark out the path through the trackless desert, foretell the coming of rain, indicate the change of seasons and bring, according to men wise in astrology, joy and pain, happiness and sorrow.

In the religious lives of the Arabs there are many holy places and a multitude of ceremonial ritual, but very little intellectual speculation. The tribes follow well-settled routes of custom and tradition, without troubling their minds unduly with the whithers and the hows. Certain groups still propitiate their gods and goddesses with human sacrifice; the goddesses showing a marked preference for Christians!

Those Arabs who have entered into bonds of alliance with Rome profess a superficial form of Christianity. Jewish tribes are scattered in

various parts of the country. While Judaism can claim affinity in origin and kinship, language and manners, Christianity too is not remote. The latter is the religion of the great neighbours,—the Roman Empire to the north and Abyssinia across the stretch of the sea on the west. The absence of law and precise rules of conduct assure for Christianity a peculiar appeal in the Arab mind. There are, of course, the Ten Commandments, but these are fortunately over-shadowed by an Eleventh and more important: "If thou sinnest, then let not thy action be found out, so that thou mayest live long to enjoy the fruit of thy sins."

In spite, however, of these predisposing circumstances, neither Judaism nor Christianity can find firm root in Arabian soil. As the Arab bears a care-free outlook upon life, Judaism is much too pessimistic a faith. It is more a pathetic tale of woe, than a code of ethics or a message of hope. God to the Jews is very much their special property. They are, in their own estimation, the chosen people among whom the promised Messiah must arise. But it is nowhere clearly explained why God should have particularly chosen the Jews as His special favourites; nor why, having done so He should keep them in

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

suspended agony for so many centuries, nor why He should treat them with such indifference. Nor, on the part of the Jews, are very convincing reasons adduced why Elijah, when he appeared as John the Baptist, should not have been accorded a welcome befitting his rank and position, and why, even after he had proved his capacity as a super-man by rejecting the overtures of the languorous Salome, his claims to prophethood should not have been conceded? Why further, when God Almighty took the trouble of deputing his only son to wash the sins of mankind, and broke all the rules of creation in connection therewith, the Jews should have mocked him and hung him up in the company of thieves? And finally why, inspite of these blasphemies, God has not looked elsewhere for a more grateful people?

Christianity too, at this time, presents no very edifying spectacle. The Church of Christ is rent by a multitude of schisms. Pandemonium reigns in the Kingdom of Heaven; Satan stalks the earth in happy security. Christ's sermons take a second place to controversies upon unity in trinity and diversity in unity. Jesus Christ was content to be a 'Son'. His followers have become 'fathers' and 'mothers'.

There are also vast tribes of 'sisters'. The outstanding miracle of the Christianity of this century seems to be the contribution of the nunneries to the population of the world.

[6]

Muhammad is now in his twenties, a fine specimen of manhood,—lithe, vigorous, thoughtful and earnest. He is honest, diligent and conscientious. He has travelled widely and done commerce with the merchants of many nations. He is intelligent; his knowledge of men and affairs is above the average. But he has few friends, and, with the exception of Abu Talib, few supporters. Certain ways and mannerisms betray him as an exotic product. He is not known to excuse fault by falsehood, nor to seek pleasure in jest or vulgarity. He is not to be found with boys of his age; women as yet mean little to him. In short, therefore, he is a good fellow, honest and likeable, but not the sort that meteor-like set the world ablaze. He has given no proofs of any particular aptitude for civic office; his contribution to the intellectual and social life of Mecca has been meagre and inconspicuous.

True, he is the moving spirit of the Hilf-i-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Fuzul, a league of chivalry, founded in memory of an ancient society instituted with similar objects. The purpose of the society, to which its members bind themselves by oath, is to defend every individual, Meccan or stranger, from any wrong or injustice, to which he might be subjected in Meccan territories, and to obtain redress from the wrong-doer. The society's particular concern are widows and orphans, and the indigent and needy. But societies of this kind have appeared, from time to time, in all parts of the world, and Mecca views with curiosity the youthful enthusiasm of the progenitor of the Hilf-i-Fuzul.

Nor in the goods of the world can it be said that Muhammad has any conspicuous share. As a race the Arabs are poor, and of them Muhammad is among the poorest. Viewed, therefore, from the standard of opulence and power in the world around, Muhammad, the newpew of Abu Talib, is a humble camel driver.

At this time, there lives in Mecca a widow, Khadija by name. Her husband died not long ago, leaving her an ample fortune, together with a running business of considerable magnitude. The latter calls for long journeys across the desert

to distant towns, and consequently for capable and honest management. Khadija hears of the young nephew of Abu Talib, Muhammad by name, *al Amin* by repute. He is accordingly summoned to her presence.

Muhammad finds in the lady Khadija a woman in the late thirties, but well-preserved. She is short of stature; has a round bright face and a broad forehead; a pair of soft hands indicate the aristocracy of her birth. She too comes of the proud Quraish, and is pleased to hear that Muhammad is a kinsman, though several degrees removed. Khadija likes Muhammad's deportment; his address is well-mannered and convincing.

The lady is pleased to secure the services of a manager, who combines looks with intelligence, and intelligence with an established probity. Muhammad on his part is pleased to serve a lady, who has received him so graciously, and in whose service there are prospects of proving his capabilities and earning adequate reward.

Muhammad, accordingly, sets out on the mission of Khadija with great hopes. Nor are these hopes ill-founded. He is well known as Abu Talib's agent in the centres of commerce; and traders welcome, from time to time, the

return of Muhammad with fresh merchandise.

Muhammad's mission on behalf of the fair Khadija leads to Damascus. Out of Mecca, he seeks the main caravan route to Syria. He passes through Yathreb, which is among the most important towns of Arabia, second only to Mecca. Here he finds a busy town of over twenty-five thousand people, well-watered and with an abundance of date groves; its inhabitants are mainly from Yemen of the fertile south. From Yathreb to Petra the route is fairly interesting, occasional bands of sand, gravel, and limestone, saltmarshes and brine pools in which only camels may drink. There is an occasional fertile patch around a spring or well, supporting a scanty agricultural population. The latter live in walled towns because of the roving Bedouin, who sweep down upon unprotected hamlets, carrying off cattle, horses and sheep.

Before entering Petra, Muhammad crosses the highlands of the western Nejd. These mountains form an irregular mass scattered over the face of a vast sandy desert, rising often to impressive heights. They offer, however, no impediment to progress, as the various ridges and massifs are separated by wide gaps through

which run the main caravan highways.

Petra stands at the end of the northern Nafud, the vast expanse of billowy red sandstone, which forms an important characteristic feature of the topographical details of the peninsula. Across these steppes lie the fertile lands of Haifa, Jerusalem and Damascus.

All along the route,—at Yathreb, at Petra, in the salt villages of Kaf and Ithra,—right up to Damascus, Muhammad sells the merchandise that has been entrusted to him. He makes advantageous bargains and returns home after long wanderings, laden with profits for his mistress.

Khadija in the meantime has looked forward to his return. Her servant Maisara, who has accompanied Muhammad, has kept her informed of the successes of her emissary. The interview with Muhammad left a deep impression upon her mind. His face haunts her days, and disturbs her thoughts. Faintly she realises that she is in love.

To Muhammad women have not counted for much. He has been too pre-occupied in his circumspections upon life and the events of his time; the commerce of life has absorbed more than its due share of his attention. Not that he

has been blind to the inspirational force of feminine charm; not that as a man he has not had his moments of doubt; not that there has been any delay in his manhood; but just that he has not paid women-kind the attention that most men of his age have paid. He is now twenty-five years old; his knowledge of the world has been secured at first hand; he has successfully employed his wits in battles of barter and money; he is neither a prude nor a high-brow. He has a tender heart, a wide sympathy and an abounding affection for the poor and oppressed. It is unlikely that a nature like his should long escape the toils of matrimony.

Khadija is rich, but riches are not the only criterion for him. As the grandson of Abdul Muttalib, as the successful trader, as the handsome man, as the possessor of an established probity, there can be no difficulty to his claims upon the richest and the most attractive girls in his community. In the lady Khadija, on the contrary, he has a widow well past the prime of life and even, according to standards of the country, much older than himself.

But Muhammad too during his mission to Syria has been disturbed by unaccountable feelings towards Khadija. He liked her pleasing

CAMEL DRIVER

manner, her speech and the tender husk in her voice, the confidence she had in him. To a man on the threshold of life, sympathy and confidence count more than physical attractions. A young wife needs an inordinate amount of attention; she has demands of body and raiment that clamour for satisfaction. A woman in the afternoon knows life too well to lay too much importance upon the transient calls of sex or finery. She is often the devoted slave of her young husband, giving him the encouragement and support that help him to face the struggles of life. It often happens, therefore, that in the battles among womenkind for the bright youngmen, older women defeat their younger rivals.

It is too personal a secret to enquire whether which of the two first broached the proposition of matrimony. If gossip is to be believed, when Khadija "felt her heart carried entirely towards him," far from resisting a legitimate inclination, she surrendered to it entirely, and, through a mutual friend, offered her hand to the subject of her thoughts. Muhammad accepted this favour with gratification.

The marriage festivities are celebrated with great *eclat*. The principal chieftains of the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Quraish are present. Abu Talib as high steward of the Ka'ba presides over the nuptials and pronounces the benefactions:

"Praise be to God Who has made us the posterity of Abraham and Ishmael. Praise be to God Who has given us this sacred land, Who has established us as the guardians of the House of Pilgrimage, and as the judges of men. Muhammad, my nephew, son of Abdullah, although without the incidents of fortune, surpasses our entire tribe in looks, in virtue, in intelligence and in the loftiness of the spirit. Muhammad, my nephew, is in love with Khadija, and Khadija is in love with him, and therefore, I unite them together as man and wife. I further declare that whatever be the necessary dower for the celebration of the marriage I undertake to be responsible therefor".

Khadija's kinsmen indicate that the lady will be satisfied with twenty camel, which are promptly made over by Abu Talib. Drum and song greet the conclusion of the ceremony. The guests sit down to a sumptuous meal, and long into the night the celebrations last. To increase the pleasure of the guests, Abu Talib orders some pretty slave girls to give a dance with timbals. Muhammad shyly conceals himself in a corner,

CAMEL DRIVER

pretending to be engaged in earnest conversation with a friend. The guests greatly relish this item in the programme and feast, with eager eyes, upon the bronze of the dancers' bodies and the scarlet of their lips.

CHAPTER II

PROPHET

Fifteen summers and winters have come and gone since Muhammad married the lady Khadija. Fifteen summers, when Arabia becomes a hell on earth, when winds with the heat of flames and laden with sand scorch every living thing; and winters, with their chill winds from the north-west. Fifteen times have the oases blossomed, and the south winds quenched the parched throat of the desert.

Khadija is now fifty-five,—well in the evening of life. Muhammad is no longer the young debonair of twenty-five or thirty. He is a father; Khadija has presented him with four daughters and two sons. First came Qasim, after whom Khadija called Muhammad Abul Qasim, followed in due seasons by Zainab, Ruqayya, Ummi-Kultum and Fatima. A boy closed the series, but did not live.

Muhammad's marriage enriched him, but did nothing to intoxicate him. It only meant a freedom from the necessity of working for his

living. Unlike so many other unions of a similar nature, he is still the unspoilt husband, and has made no inroads upon his wife's estate. Prosperity has made no difference to his nature. He is still at heart a poor man with a rich wife; her means solve for him only the problem of his daily food and raiment, both of which are of the simplest. Khadija's wealth, however, means more to his friends and to those who are in want and come to him for help. He is unable to help them himself, but he recommends them to Khadija, as deserving of her generosity. The lady Khadija too is kind-hearted, and loves to help the needy; and thus do Muhammad and Khadija unostentatiously bring rays of sunlight into many homes. But in the fifteen years that have gone by, Muhammad has made no important contribution to the social schemes of his times. The promise of youth is as yet unfulfilled.

Muhammad, it is now observed, is more exclusive than ever. His friends are few and far between. He is not to be found in gay coteries; he avoids social engagements; he has become silent, reserved and introspective. Is he tired of life? Does he despair of fate? Is he one of those unfortunate men whom fate mocks

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

with mirages of wealth, fame and the good things of life, only to prove that the end of the journey, like its beginning, is the desert?

Why does he wander aimlessly long hours among the hills? What does he do in the time which he spends away from his family? Is there a kink in his brain, or is he secretly concocting a potion to astound the world?

[2]

Fifteen years. Great events have marked the pages of history.

The Roman Empire, both in its eastern and western spheres, has revealed signs of decay. Many cancers augment the dying agonies of the Empire. But the skill of Byzantine workmen still gives the temper to the swords of Tuscany and Pontus. Arms in plenty are stored in the magazines. There is no paucity of ships, engines of war or effective fortifications. The science of tactics, the order and evolution and stratagem are studied in the military academies. But the Empire can no longer supply the race of men to handle these weapons, to guard the embattlements, to navigate the ships or to reduce the theories of war into the bold practice

PROPHET

of triumph. Since Justinian shared the throne of the Caesars with a harlot, never have the camps of Asia and Europe been more agitated by frequent and furious sedition. It is in the camp that the authority of the Emperor should be conclusive and despotic; it is only in the camps that his authority has been disobeyed and unheeded; soldiers have reproached and pursued their trembling generals, overturned the statues of the Emperor and cast stones at the crucified images of Christ. This tragic scene was finally closed by the execution of the Emperor Maurice himself with his sons. Their bodies were cast into the sea, their heads exhibited for the delectation of the populace. Phocas, for a few years, ruled the eastern Empire, a short diminutive person, with shaggy eye brows, red hair, and a beardless chin. He was ignorant of law, letters and even arms. Possessed of a savage temper, easily enflamed by pain, hardened by fear and exasperated by resistance and reproach, he spent his reign in the by-ways of lust and drunkenness;—until, he too paid the penalty of his transgressions. Stripped of purple and diadem, robed in vile garments and loaded in fetters he was led to his end. Naked before a jeering crowd of men and women who mocked his shame, his

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

head was severed and his mangled trunk cast into a huge bonfire. Heraclius then took his seat on the throne of the Caesars. In the western empire, the sun of Rome also appears to have set, but the twilight of her greatness still rests upon the world. The vast empire consolidated by Justinian, renewed and expanded with his imperial breath, has crumpled like a blown-out bladder. The Lombards have retaken most of the Italian possessions. The Avars and Slavs sweeping down from the basin of the Danube to the Adriatic have swamped the intervening territories floodlike.

In Persia Khusru II is carrying on the magnificent achievements of his grandfather Khusru I. His armies have reached Chalcedon, and threaten to over run Damascus and Jerusalem. Who can say that he will not extend his sway to Yathreb, Mecca and Sana?

Nearer home, Muhammad finds his country rent with internal wars, fratricidal conflict and tribal jealousies. The nation he loves is sunk in ignorance, obscenity and superstition. For all their virtue, gallantry and courage, they are lawless, cruel and inhuman. He finds no central authority, no nationhood, no law, no justice. There is, of course, the tribal patriot-

PROPHET

ism, but it is a good thing erred to excess. In short, there are gaping wounds of cheap controversy, the country bleeds to death of blood feuds. The Ka'ba was raised to the glory of one God. But the conception of the great Creator of the universe is now vague and blurred. The universe has been distributed among a multitude of idols. The social life of the people is primitive and, in many ways, repulsive. Infanticide is rampant; women are no better than cattle, their main function being to slake the thirsts of passion; wine and dice are rife; notions of loyalty and private right are hazy.

Can Arabia and its people be united, as well as purged of their barbaric practices? Muhammad scans the religious horizon. The Jews have much that appeals to him; he has a convincing belief in the mission of Moses and Abraham; but Judaism translates into practice the egoism of the Jews. In certain respects, there is much to commend the two less important creeds—Manism and Zoroastrianism. The Zoroastrians worship no idols or images; the number of their gods is modestly limited to two, a good one Ormuzd, who is frank, truthful and generous; the other, Ahriman who is secretive, cunning and diplomatic. The sacred fire is a central part

of the religion. But the practice of this religion is too priest-bound. Moreover, Zoroaster lived too long ago for the people of the day to know precisely what he had to say. Manism has the advantage of being at least a thousand years more recent. Mani did not confine himself to the Zoroastrian gods, but they formed the central figures in his canvas, and around them he grouped a comprehensive theocrasia. He declared quite modestly—no doubt correctly—that he was not proclaiming anything new. He claimed merely to clarify the confusions and imperfections of the prophets before him. But it requires more than ordinary intelligence to precisely follow the route taken by the Mani caravan. Like Zoroastrianism, it must be scored off the list of possible religions suitable for the tribes of Arabia.

The religion taught by Jesus, and expounded by his immediate disciples, appeals to much that is noble in man. If Christianity is not more forceful than the Mythraic and Isaic creeds, its message is more confident to the down-trodden; it promises equality and brotherhood among mankind; its Kingdom of Heaven is less veiled in mystery in contrast with some of the earlier speculations, and, by joining the

PROPHET

church, one can reserve accommodation in advance. To those who were turning from the mysticism of older cults or fleeing from the indecencies of pagan worship, early Christianity brought welcome relief. But the premature cessation of Jesus' ministry and the absence of an organic code form considerable ground for contentious debate not merely as to what the Lord said but about the Lord himself. Various groups of Christians, accordingly, have maintained fundamentally divergent doctrines. Thus in the fullest conscience, Father and Son may be regarded as distinct from the man Jesus, the Creator of the world; or Jesus may be an emanation from the Divine Essence come upon earth to destroy Satan, the Prince of Darkness; that there is no real distinction between Father and Son and the Holy Ghost; or that Jesus was merely a man, only that a certain energy proceeding from a Supreme Father had united itself with the man Jesus constituting him into the Son of God; or that Christ is the same essence as God; or that he is not of the same essence; and so on in finer speculation.

That all these divergent views should have given rise to sharp controversy should occasion but little surprise. Muhammad sees the Church

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

of God torn into a myriad schisms; on all sides a sanguine conflict rages for its possession. Christ's love, charity, peace and goodwill have been interpreted in massacre, murder and outrage. Under the pious enthusiasm of Theodora, the streets, where she at one time plied her trade in lust, have run with Christian blood. In Alexandria the noble Hypatia has been raped and slaughtered by zealous professors of Christianity, and the fiend, who instigated this barbarity, has been canonized as a saint of the church.

[3]

Fifteen years have rolled by since the chiefs of the Quraish celebrated the marriage of Muhammad, the grandson of Abdul Muttalib, to Khadija, the rich widow. Muhammad is now past forty. Apart from his achievements as a husband and father, mists hang about his life-story. A legend, a tradition, a gossip may give glimpses of him during this period, but a solitary incident of civic importance is authentic.

When peace succeeded a tumult of arms, the Quraish wished to raise a monument to the recent triumphs of their tribe. They could think of no more fitting memorial to their arms than the reconstruction of the sacred Ka'ba into

PROPHET

a more commodious and impressive building. The temple was, accordingly, demolished and rebuilt. When the building had so far progressed that the blackstone should be placed in position, the right of handling this sacred object gave rise to sharp differences as to precedence among the tribes. After long discussion they agreed to abide by the decision of the person who entered the temple first. By chance this happened to be Muhammad. When required to arbitrate, he decided that the sacred stone should be placed in position by means of a large carpet, one man from each tribe lending a hand in the task. And thus, the great stone was reverently moved into location, to the satisfaction of all concerned, Muhammad making the final adjustment.

With this solitary glimpse of him, and the occasional glimpses of him wandering aimlessly among the neighbouring hills, the rest of the story of these years is as broken and fragmentary as a puzzle of which half the pieces have been lost. Muhammad is to be seen often deep in thought. He has withdrawn more and more into solitude. Among these gloomy hills, midst rock and gaping precipice, where no tree spreads its shade, where flower blossoms, nor is the mind

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

refreshed with the sound of water, Muhammad has been in deep contemplation. There has gradually awakened in him the realization that the religions hitherto revealed, the social systems set up, and the civilizations of the day have outlived their utility. He is convinced that his people stand in need of a purer religion, easy of comprehension, but of ample ambit,—a religion that will inspire the ardent genius of his race, whom it will seduce by the grace of its mode and astound by the magnificence of its conceptions. The purpose of his life begins gradually to unfold itself. These suspicions are confirmed in an unexpected manner.

[4]

It is an early spring morning, with a chill wind from the north-east. The stars are blinking sleepily, as a pale blue dawn grows in the east. Muhammad is hurrying down a hill-side. In the hollow of the horizon lies Mecca, its square flat roofs are now faintly visible. An occasional cock crows, calling the world to a new day. In an unpretentious house, not far from the Ka'ba, sleeps Khadija in the midst of her children. A dim light is burning in a corner, shielded from the sleepers' eyes by

PROPHET

a shawl thrown lightly across.

Suddenly there is the sound of hurrying footsteps, and a sharp knock at the door.

"Who is it?" Khadija asks a little nervously.

"It is me Abul Qasim. Open the door; quick". Khadija hastens out of bed and unfastens the latch. The noise has disturbed the children, who sit up and look with astonishment. Muhammad bursts in. His hair is dishevelled; there is a wild look in his eyes; his mouth is dry and parched.

"What is the matter, Abul Qasim?"

For a moment Muhammad is speechless,—then breathlessly: "I cannot tell you."

"But why not, Abul Qasim? What happened to-night?"

Not until Khadija has promised to listen attentively, does Muhammad agree to tell his story.

As Khadija presses his arm softly and takes him into another room, where the children would not overhear, there is again that wild look in his eyes and the gasp in his breath:

"To-night, as on other nights, everything on Mount Hira seemed very peaceful. Only the stars looked a little brighter than usual.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

When I had said my prayers, I covered myself in my blanket and fell asleep. It could not have been very long after mid-night, when I was awakened by a loud crack of thunder. A huge black cloud hung overhead stretching towards Mecca. I felt lifted up by a mighty force. Suddenly, the Archangel Gabriel appeared, surrounded by many companions. A crash of lightning and thunder tore the night sky. Twice I heard a voice call out to me; I wanted to answer but could not open my mouth. A third time, the voice commanded: 'Cry!' Then I said, 'What shall I cry?'

"The answer came, 'Cry in the name of the Lord, the Creator.'

"Again I said: 'I cannot cry'.

"The angel smiled and directed me a fourth time to cry: 'Cry in the name of the God of adoration, the God Who made men out of a clot of blood, Who taught man what he knew not, and filled his soul with the rays of knowledge'."

"Yes, and then?"

"The same spectacular show of divine power, thunder, lightning, and then darkness. I wasn't dreaming, Khadija. Nor have I gone mad."

PROPHET

"Abul Qasim, Allah loves you too well to mock you. Why should He want to hurt you? You speak the truth; you don't return evil for evil; you keep your faith and promises; you are kind and generous; you are honest in your dealings; you are shy and modest. On the contrary, I am sure, we should rejoice, dear husband, and be of good cheer. It seems Allah has chosen you for some great work.

Later in the day, unknown to Muhammad, Khadija goes to her old cousin the blind Waraka, who is learned in the scriptures of the Jews and the Christians. Waraka is overjoyed to hear what Khadija has to tell him. A smile crosses his wrinkled face.

"*Kuddusum! Kuddusum!*" says he, "Holy! Holy! This is the *Namas-al-Akbar*, a revelation such as came to Moses and to Jesus. Tell Muhammad to be brave and cheerful. It is ordained that he be a prophet among his people."

Khadija is overjoyed and hurries home to repeat Waraka's message.

"Abul Qasim, I was confident before," she tells her husband, "that your vision on Mount Hira was no derangement of your mind. I am now convinced that the Lord has chosen you to

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

deliver a message to our people. There is no God but Allah, and you Muhammad are his messenger. *La Ilaha-ill-Allah, Muhammad-ar-Rasul-ullah.*"

[5]

Though Khadija and Waraka have so readily believed in the revelation, the Prophet-designate himself requires some further proofs of his mission than a solitary revelation. Further revelations are, however, not long delayed. The Archangel Gabriel has been assigned the task of educating Muhammad in his destined roll, and finds him often on Mount Hira. Generally he is in meditation, otherwise resting from long arduous hours of devotion.

On the second night the Revealer says:

"Awaken, O One with a cloak, and pray. Glorify the Lord; purify your raiments; fly from abomination, seek not after worldly gains: and, wait patiently upon the dictates of your God, for Allah is the fount of fear. He is also the fount of mercy".

On another visit, Gabriel addresses the Prophet as "You, who are wrapped in a cloak" and tells him to keep long night vigils, for Allah has words of weight to communicate to

PROPHET

him. The Archangel also exhorts Muhammad to leave all other gods and to always remember and devote himself to the One God, promising that "whatever good men send before them for their souls will be found with Allah." Muhammad is also exhorted to seek forgiveness, for Allah is forgiving and merciful.

On other occasions various behests of the divine will are revealed;—the disgust of the Lord towards those who defraud by false weights and measures, who renege from promises and contracts, who misappropriate property of widows and orphans, who blaspheme against religion; the pleasure of the Lord towards those who give freedom to their slaves, who feed the hungry, and do good turns to orphans and the wretched in misery. It is also revealed that, on the Day of Judgment, whosoever has done an atom's weight of good will have his reward, and whosoever has done an atom's weight of ill will also have his reward. If the scales of judgment turn in his favour, his life hereafter will be pleasant, otherwise he will be consigned to the raging fires of Hell.

To assure his followers that he is not possessed of the devil, Muhammad is told that Allah has not deserted him, though he has been, at

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

times, found in error, which, however, have been forgiven. Muhammad is also assured that the Omnipotent will reward him in the measure of his desires and actions; for, did not the Lord protect him when he was an orphan, direct him to the right path when he strayed, like others of his race, into temptation, and enrich him when he was poor? Has not the Lord brought him fame and eased the burdens of his life? What was revealed to him on that great night of the first revelation was better than a thousand nights. The peace—Islam—that was revealed on that night of power will abide to the dawn. And of those, who taunt Muhammad on the loss of his two sons and mock his family of daughters, the Lord says: "We have given you *strength*, and it is your insulters, the idolaters and not you, who are without posterity".

Muhammad is also taught the *Al-Fatihah*, a simple prayer, in which he is to supplicate himself before the Almighty:

"All praise be to God, the Sovereign of the World, the Beneficent and the Merciful. King of the Day of Judgment, Lord, we worship You and beseech Your assistance. Lead us on the right path, the path of those whom You favour,—not the path of those who merit Your retribu-

PROPHET

tion, or of those who persist in the error of their ways”.

Such is, in brief, the simple faith that Khadija accepts, and which is to establish Muhammad's claims to the apostolic succession to Moses and Abraham. It is clearly a faith that the meanest intelligence can comprehend. It is manifestly common ground upon which divergent view-points can assemble. The substance is both simple and magnificent,—the Unity and omnipotence of the one God, who is the Creator of the Universe, Wise, Just, True and All-Knowing, the Unerring Guide, the Generous and Forgiving Master.

The clarity and simplicity of Muhammad's creed sounds the death-knell of the religious conceptions prevalent among the people of Arabia. No more is it necessary to tax their intelligence, imagination or credibility. No more is it necessary to diversify the God-head, nor to deify the various manifestations of nature. Oracles from trees, stars and phenomena of nature become unnecessary, so too gods and goddesses, priests and priestesses, phallic symbols and monuments of wood and stone. Into the Arab world there floats the tangible conception, the convincing realisation of a superior deity—

a God of gods, a God of the Universe. Muhammad's message emphasises His unity and His impartibility. Muhammad's God is never born and never dies. His majesty and His mercy surpass the bounds of eloquence, His creation that of human comprehension. Muhammad, for himself, lays no claim to divinity or semi-divinity; he seeks neither favour nor recognition. He feels he has been called to deliver a message, and that he is a mere humble messenger. To him the message of *Islam*—the message of peace—is the balm provided by an All Bountiful Providence for the uplift of his people. He goes forward with his appointed task with earnestness and determination, mellowed, however, with humility.

The substance, therefore, of the Islam that he begins to preach consists in a belief in the unity, immortality, power, mercy and the supreme love of the Creator. He preaches charity and brotherhood, the subjugation of wants and passions within human limits, and proclaims the gratitude of human kind to the All Bountiful. Finally, he reminds his hearers of the accountability of human conduct upon a Day of reckoning. But Muhammad makes no fuss or show abroad. Advertisement and self-aggrandise-

PROPHET

ment are foreign to his nature. He has been a recluse for sixteen years; he is diffident and nervous of publicity. Will the world believe in him? Or, will he be laughed and jeered at in the market places? Will he be decked with a crown of thorns and be crucified with thieves? Will he be shunned as one demented? Slowly and cautiously, therefore, he treads step by step the path of destiny.

[6]

Although now convinced of the truth of his prophetic mission, Muhammad enters his office of teacher with great circumspection. He turns first to his family, that he might be accepted by them as the messenger of God. Khadija is already a firm believer, perhaps a shade more firm than circumstances admit. After Khadija and his children, Muhammad recognises in Ali his next disciple. Ali is the eleven years old son of Abu Talib. And greatly does little Ali love Muhammad. Like the rest of his family, he has heard of Muhammad's call. His childish enthusiasm is aroused; and, when his street-mates tease him about his cousin Muhammad having gone mad, he fiercely disputes the matter. Muhammad too loves Ali. He

sees in Ali a boy of rare merit, who has all the makings of a national hero,—handsome in looks, impetuous in courage, of ardent imagination and unusual intelligence. Ali believes in every word of Muhammad, and vows, with youthful fervour, to shed his blood in the cause of the God of Islam and its Prophet.

Close in Muhammad's domestic affections is also Zaid-ibn Harith. At one time Zaid was a slave, offered at Yathreb to the highest bidder. He was acquired by the lady Khadija and employed to attend upon her husband, Muhammad. Muhammad took a great liking to Zaid, and sought his wife's permission to give him his liberty. When Zaid's father came to claim his free son, the former proved loyal to the master and the mistress, who had given him his freedom, and stayed on to serve them as before.

Zaid has no doubts of the mission entrusted to Muhammad. He has never known Muhammad to tell a lie or to take a mean advantage. To him, Muhammad stands for all that is clean and honest in life. It is inconceivable to him that he should have fabricated the story of his revelations, in order to clothe himself in the raiments of divine messenger. Zaid, therefore, is the third convert to Islam.

PROPHET

A test of young Ali's character is soon forthcoming. Abu Talib learns that not only does Ali spend all his time with Muhammad, but has also sworn to shed his blood in the cause of his new doctrines. Abu Talib hurries to find his son and bring him home. He finds him in the midst of a small group of persons in earnest prayer. Among others there is Muhammad and Khadija.

"Muhammad," says Abu Talib sternly, "What religion is this?"

"It is the religion of Allah the Great", replies Muhammad calmly, "the religion of our ancestor, Abraham".

"And who are you?" queries Abu Talib with a smile.

"I am His messenger, and I invite you dear uncle", says Muhammad with a new-found confidence, "to join us".

Abu Talib loves Muhammad too well to be annoyed.

"Muhammad, I know you are a sincere man, but how can I give up the faith of my forefathers? All I can do is to shelter you from the wrath of your kinsmen; and, as long as I live, I promise that no harm will come to you". And turning to his son: "Come with me Ali".

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Ali's heart thumps a few extra rounds. He flushes as he bravely looks up into his father's face.

"That is impossible father; I have sworn to serve God and His Prophet".

Muhammad puts an affectionate hand on Ali's shoulder: "Go, if you want to".

"Never, Apostle of God", and Ali's bright eyes sparkle.

"Well, if he won't, he won't", says Abu Talib regretfully. "I know he will be safe with you Muhammad, and you will not lead him into anything that is evil."

When Ali, Zaid and Khadija have formed the nucleus of his following, Muhammad turns towards the more intimate of his friends. He has known Abdullah-ibn Abu Kuhafa since a child. They often played together as children, and exchanged confidences in their youth. They are still close friends. The Abdullah of his boyhood days is now Abdul Ka'ba, a distinguished official in the service of the sacred shrine. He is a merchant by profession and a man of ample means. He is known widely as a man of unusual prudence, honesty and judg-

PROPHET

ment. He enjoys wealth, character and public esteem. Muhammad realises that Abdul Ka'ba, would be invaluable as an acquisition to his new movement. But can Muhammad convince him? Why should Abdul Ka'ba desert a career and high civic office for the arguable propositions of an eccentric friend? But before a few months have elapsed, Abdul Ka'ba has surrendered to the message of Muhammad and turned Muslim.

Few missionaries can improve upon the zeal and the conviction of the new convert. Islam is showing signs of extraordinary reproductivity. Each fresh disciple gained is a potential messenger of excellent fecundity. Ali, Zaid, and Khadija are spreading the message with enthusiasm. Abdul Ka'ba is making converts in many quarters, and leads to the feet of the Apostle several important members of the Quraish; among others, Abdur Rehman son of Hauf, Sa'd son of Abu Wakas, Zobair son of Al Awam and Talha son of Abidullah, Said son of Zaid, Abdullah son of Masood, and Amir son of Jaser. Such are the first conquests of Al Islam. In numbers the converts may not be important, but the details of their birth, talent and worldly means are impressive.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

And thus three years go by. Slowly, very slowly, oft-times imperceptibly, Muhammad's audience increases from his immediate family to forty. He has spent much time in instructing them, and strengthening them in the details of their new faith. In these three years Muhammad has also seen faint specks of hope upon the horizons of the future.

[7]

Muhammad has hitherto been content to teach within the confines of a narrow circle,—his family, intimate friends, and the few strangers who have joined his fold. How long this period of diffidence would continue it is difficult to say, if it had not been revealed that the time had arrived for the Prophet to publicly announce his mission.

"Do not strain your eyes after what We have given others to enjoy", said the Voice, "and do not grieve for them. Tell them that you are a plain warner, like We sent to those who declared the Koran a lie. Therefore, declare openly that you are commanded by Us and sent to do Our biddings. We have created the earth and the heavens, and all that fills the intervening space. Truth presided at Our work. We have

PROPHET

given you the seven verses of prayer, and the precious Koran. Serve Us, therefore, till We end your days."

Muhammad, accordingly, hastens to fulfil the mandate of his Master. He convenes an assembly of the Quraish on Mount Sufa; and here, for the first time, publicly proclaims his message.

"Have you ever heard me tell a lie?", enquires the Prophet.

There is a prompt chorus of unanimity: "Never".

"If I should tell you that behind this mountain there is a large army hidden to attack and destroy you, would you believe me?"

"Of course, we should."

"Then listen."

Muhammad recites verses from the Koran. The music of his voice casts a spell over the assembly.

For a century it has been the golden age of Arabic prose and literature. The fame of Arab talent has been carried to the courts of Rome and India. Poets and writers abound. The Arab script has reached perfection. But Muhammad's recitation is something different. Its lilt is infectious, its rythm is majestic, its con-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

ception is grand. It surpasses anything contrived by the brain of man. It is sweet, it is bitter, it is acid; it is terrifying, it is comforting; it rings despair, it raises hopes; it is an attractive landscape, it flashes thunder and lightning; it is the sum and essence of the scriptures and the wisdom of the world.

"Praise the name of the Lord, the most high, Who creates and then perfects His creation, Who measures and guides, Who brings forth pastures of the fields, and Who in time reduces it to dry dust. O You who prefer the life of this world! The hereafter is better and more lasting. This truth is consecrated in the ancient scriptures, in the books of Abraham and Moses."

And then continues: "In the name of the Lord, the Beneficent and Compassionate. By the Dawn and the ten Nights, the even and the odd, the Night when it departs, have you not considered how the Lord dealt with Ad and Samood, and with Pharoah, the lord of hosts? Return to the Lord and enter among His servants and into His garden.

"By the Sun, its bright rays, and the Moon that follows, and the Day that brings him forth and the Night that covers his shining front, by Heaven and its Architect, by the

PROPHET

Earth and Him Who spreads it, by the Soul and He Who has perfected it, by the Night when it spreads its shadows and the Day resplendent, by the Creator of mankind, he who is charitable and fears the Lord and professes the sublime religion, will find the road to happiness easy. He who disbelieves will find the way to diversity easy; he shall perish and his riches will not save him. Therefore, I have warned you of the flaming fire."

Some are silent with a faint fear in their hearts; several jeer at his words; the meshes of truth are still wide; only a few filter through to Islam.

Muhammad next directs Ali to invite the important among the Quraish to a feast. About forty respond to the invitation. At the conclusion of the meal Muhammad talks to his guests of his new creed and takes soundings of their susceptibilities. But Abdul Uzza detests Muhammad and cuts short the discourse.

"Muhammad," says he, "I thought you invited us to a feast, not to a sermon. The hour is late, let us go."

These remarks signal the break up of the gathering. But the Prophet is not discouraged, for such incidents are to be expected.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

"Ali," says he, "did you notice how Abdul Uzza deliberately interrupted me? Well, we must try again tomorrow. Arrange another feast and invite the same company again.

The leaders of the Quraish again respond, for they are among the wise men who eat feasts and do not refuse them.

When the dishes have been removed and hands washed, the guests settle down to comfortably puff off their satisfaction in smoke. Muhammad again draws the attention of the gathering to the problems of the day—the evils of society life, death and post-mortal reckoning; the infallible and infinitely merciful Judge; the rewards and punishments of the hereafter; the attractions—milk, honey and fair rewards of Paradise. Says he: "Never has a mortal being offered to his people anything so precious. I offer you good fortune and success in this world and felicity in eternity. As God has directed me to you, I call you to Him, Who is the Master of the Universe. Which of you will participate with me in this service? Which of you would like to be my brother, my lieutenant and my deputy?"

There is silence. The guests look awkwardly at each other. Is there anyone forth-

PROPHET

coming to accept the invitation? Does anyone want to be Muhammad's brother, lieutenant or caliph? Abdul Uzza sniggers to himself.

Ali watches Abdul Uzza. Flushed and hot he rises, and, giving Abdul Uzza a withering look, declares: "Prophet of Allah! I will be that man. I will share your labours; I will fight your enemies, break their opposition and with this trusty sword defend you.

Muhammad goes up to Ali and embraces him with delight. Proudly to his kinsmen declares the Prophet: "Here friends is my brother, my lieutenant and my deputy. Hear him and obey him".

Abdul Uzza laughs heartily, and calls out: "Abu Talib, henceforth you will have to take orders from your son."

This meagre success, however, does not damp the ardour of the new Apostle. Convinced of the divine purpose of his destiny, he proceeds ahead, regardless of the consequences, and continues to preach the message of Islam. The Quraish tremble for the fate of their gods; the great become apprehensive of their power, more so as Muhammad's circle of listeners shows marked signs of widening. In the tribe as

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

a whole Muhammad's preachings are raising storms of opposition and ill-feeling. Abu Talib is among the very few who can now tolerate his activities, for his love of Muhammad exceeds that for the three hundred gods in his keeping.

The chieftains of the Quraish headed by Abdul Uzza, Utba, Abu Sufyan and Jalaluddin seek Abu Talib's intervention.

"Abu Talib", they say, "your nephew covers our gods with opprobrium, he accuses our sages of ignorance and maintains that our fathers lived in error. We have come to ask you to intervene. You must make him mend his ways, for, if he does not, we are afraid, discord will supplant the peace of our tribe". The Quraish also hint that Abu Talib is as much duty bound as they are to vindicate the honour of their common faith. Their parting words indicate their desperation:

"Either deal with him yourself, or let us settle accounts with him".

Abu Talib, however, achieves scant success. Muhammad is emphatic: "I can preach no doctrine but the doctrine of the One God. The object of my teaching is to wean our people from the errors into which they have strayed.

PROPHET

But they are wrong if they say that I have attacked the sanctity of the Ka'ba. On the contrary, I have regularly joined in ceremonies of the pilgrimage. It is also wrong to say that I have abused anybody's gods, for the Koran has explicitly forbidden this: 'Do not abuse them whom they worship besides Allah! All I have preached is that the worship of gods other than Allah can neither do them good, nor do them any harm'.

The Prophet, therefore, continues as before. He lauds the qualities of the Supreme, and the impotence of the gods of the infidels; his discourses are full of light and meaning. But polytheism is deeply rooted in the minds of the Arabs; it has also attractions that the new faith lacks. The cult of the day with its ritual and ceremonies is a gaily-decked woman of the street, lecherous and seductive. In distinction no ornamentation is to be found in the new cult, which is plain, homely and sensible. The Quraish, as custodians of the Ka'ba and the seats of pilgrimage, have also a vested interest in the empire of Hobal and his co-gods. These interests, combined with the strength of settled beliefs and established superstitions, plus the usual apathy against change, form a formid-

able opposition to the propagation of Muhammad's teachings.

There is also the general alarm as such occasions are wont to cause. The chieftains of the Quraish, therefore, unite to eliminate the impudent intruder, the brazen shaker of their altars.

For a second time, the leaders of the Quraish seek Abu Talib; they are firmly resolved to press the issue to a finality. They remind him of the warning they conveyed when they first saw him; they describe how things have gone from bad to worse. They express concern about Muhammad's larger audiences, and emphasize that he can no longer be ignored, for the people have ceased to look upon him with curiosity; they now listen to him eagerly as if he had a message to deliver for their benefit. The Quraish also hint that Muhammad is, in reality, aiming at a dictatorship in Mecca in the guise of religion; that the constitution and the faith that are dear to them would soon be in the melting pot, if the activities of this upstart, this self-appointed prophet continue unchecked. Abu Talib finds they are in earnest, particularly when they add: "If you do not silence your nephew, and severely reprimand him for his im-

pertinence and misplaced zeal, we propose to take up arms in the defence of our religion, irrespective of any ties of blood."

The pious Abu Talib sits on the horns of a dilemma. On the one side there is his love for Muhammad, on the other loyalty to his tribe.

"Have pity on me and my old age," he begs of his nephew, "do not burden me with responsibilities too heavy for me to bear. We are no match for the combined opposition of the Quraish against us".

For all Abu Talib's arguments and reasoning, Muhammad is unmoved in his determination to do his duty. "If the Quraish arrayed against me the sun and moon, it would make no difference. Nothing will make me abandon the mission to which Allah has called me. I go ahead irrespective of consequences".

Tears appear in the aged patriarch's eyes. He kisses Muhammad on the forehead. "I knew" says he, "before I came here, what your answer would be. Muhammad, so long as I live, I will never desert you".

Abu Talib communicates the failure of his mission, but advises the Quraish not to be hasty in the steps they propose to take. He also impresses upon them the necessity of regarding

with toleration the difference in views that divide his nephew from them. "He is an honourable man," adds Abu Talib—"one whom you yourselves called *al Amin*. He has adopted a new religion. Why persecute him?"

The Quraish, however, are determined upon persecution, which now starts in real earnest. The poorer and less influential followers of the Prophet bear the brunt of the oppression. An example is made of Yasir, whose legs are tied to two camels and the beasts are driven in opposite directions. Sumayya is raped before being torn to pieces; Bilal, the Abyssinian is tortured mercilessly, being made to lie out during the noon-day upon the burning sand with a heavy slab of stone upon his legs. The Prophet and his immediate followers suffer calumny and vilification, abuse and interference with their prayers and devotions in the Ka'ba. In all these persecutions the moving spirits are Abul Uzza and Jalaluddin.

Of all the qualities that attract the wonder and reverence of mankind, the superlative excellence is courage, the perfect determination that no terror can shake, that no persecution can deter, the will that is attracted by frown and hostility, which indeed makes use of them

to awaken the reserves of energy and fans these reserves to flames, and which qualities are never at their best until the hazards are extreme. The man who puts his life in peril for a cause which he esteems becomes the darling of all men. His courage is contagious. It awakens the courage of others. Everywhere it finds its magnetic affinity. Everything feels its new breath. It awakens hearts of men like a trumpet call. The persecution of the Quraish has, therefore, two-fold results,—it inspires the Prophet and his followers with a new courage and determination; it also excites the admiration and the sympathy of a wider circle of listeners.

Of the latter the most important is Hamza, the Prophet's uncle. He is a warrior *par excellence*, courageous, honourable and thoughtless of consequences. The odds of opposition do not deter him. He is known among the tribes as a 'lion', so struck are people by his valour; danger to him is an illusion; his eye is not easily daunted, his heart is full of the magic of the drums that lead to battle.

Amidst the persecutions by Abdul Uzza and his friends, Hamza learns of a personal insult offered to the Prophet. Boiling with rage and carrying his mighty bow upon his shoulders

he goes straight to the assembly of the Quraish to strike Abdul Uzza dead, who is, however, saved by his friends.

In a loud voice the irate Hamza tells the assembled Quraish: "I declare to you that I have quitted the altars of your gods, and I am one of them,—a Muslim".

The conversion of Hamza is a triumph for the Prophet. But a greater one is at hand. Hamza's advent to the fold has put heart into the movement; it has also lowered the pride of the Quraish. For some time they cannot vent their hate in the open. But they secretly conspire Muhammad's death. They look out for a determined man to carry out their plans. All eyes turn to Umar.

Umar is twenty-six, of gigantic stature and fabulous strength. He is notorious for a fiery temper, and a wild aspect that terrifies the boldest. The muscles of his arms strike more fear than is inspired by the swords of others. He is, therefore, just the man for the purpose. The plotters, by the soft arts of persuasion, win his support. They praise his heroism, his chivalry; they beg of him to render this public service. Deft words succeed.

The fury of Umar is aroused. "I will slay

PROPHET

this sabean," he says, "who has destroyed the unity of our tribe, who calls our religion shameful, and blasphemes against our gods."

Umar is well armed as he sets out upon his mission. He walks down the street in gigantic strides. The little children run into their houses, for his name is handy to mothers of naughty children. The towns-folk are also scared, for they see a frown on Umar's forehead and an ominous blade in his hand.

"Where are you off to?" asks a friend on the way.

"To kill Muhammad, the blasphemer," he says.

"Take my advice, do not kill Muhammad. His death will cause more trouble than his life; for, when you have done this, do you think the Banu Hashim will let you crowd the earth for long? Is it not better that you find out the Muslims in your own family and keep them straight?"

"And who are they?" demands Umar. "Your sister Fatima, of course, and her husband Said-ibn Zaid."

Umar postpones his revenge upon Muhammad, and directs his footsteps to his sister's house. As he enters the outer courtyard he

hears Khabbab-ibn Arit's voice reading something aloud. He stands in the doorway for a moment and listens: "My God is the dispensator of all things."

At the sound of Umar's footsteps, Khabbab makes speedy retreat into an adjoining room; Fatima hurriedly hides the leaf, upon which the *Sura* is written, under her knee.

Umar enters in a flaming rage. "What did I hear? The Koran?"

"You heard nothing."

"Am I deaf?" Umar thunders. "You have become Muslims. Is that true?" His eyes rest fiercely on Said: "You will pay for this." A blade flashes, as Umar plunges forward towards Said, but Fatima has caught her brother's hand and the weapon clatters harmlessly on to the stone floor. There is a scuffle between Said and his assailant in which Fatima too has a share. Only when Umar sees her bleeding, does he stop belabouring the unfortunate Said.

Fatima says defiantly: "Yes, Umar, we are Muslims; we believe in Allah and His messenger Muhammad, so do what you like."

Umar has fought men before, he has never fought a woman. His temper subsides as rapidly as it flared. "Let me see what you

were reading."

"You'll destroy it."

"No I won't. Upon my word I won't. I will return it to you." Umar's word is as good as his deed. Khabbab thinks it is now safe to come out. Umar sits on Fatima's bed and reads aloud "*Ta Ha*." "We have not revealed this Koran to you Muhammad that you should be distressed, but as a reminder to those who fear Him, Who has created the Earth and raised the Heavens. So, I, even I, am Allah. There is no God save Me. So serve Me and establish the worship of my remembrance. Fear nothing, I will be with you. I hear and I see." And so on to the end.

Enthusiasm has taken the place of violence: "But this is exquisite. This is a sublime. Where is Muhammad? Khabbab lead me to your Prophet, that I may surrender myself to him."

Khabbab is delighted. He leads Umar to the citadel of Safa, where Muhammad has retired to evade the persecution of the Quraish. The Prophet is preaching to a congregation, who are listening attentively to the Master's words. Umar, as he enters the doorway, is recognised by Hamza, Abdul Ka'ba and Ali. The audience

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

turns to see who the intruder is, and are surprised to see Umar armed to the teeth. They rise quickly, for they are afraid for the Prophet's safety. But Muhammad is apparently inaccessible to fear, for as soon as he sees Umar, he stops his discourse and goes straight up to receive him as a friend.

"Allah be praised," says the Prophet, "only yesterday, I prayed to Him to strengthen Al Islam with Abul Hukum-ibn Hisham or Umar-ibn Al Khattab and Allah is *Akbar* and here is Umar." So saying the Prophet puts his hand on Umar: "Umar, son of Khattab, you may stay with us as long as you like."

"I come," says Umar, "to believe in God and his Apostle."

Cries of *Allah-ho Akbar* greet this declaration.

"You are my brother," says the Prophet and presses Umar to his breast. Everyone present in turn greets Umar in the same manner. There is great rejoicing in the Muslim camp at Umar's conversion to Islam.

Al Islam has thus won its first conquest, it has performed its first miracle. The transmutation of dust into gold seems trivial compared to the overnight transmutation of avow-

PROPHET

ed foes into passionate Muslims. Such is the alchemy of Al Islam. The advent of Umar is important to Islam in more respects than one. Umar has been known as one of the bitterest foes of the new religion; he has been known to hate the Prophet's person and to conspire his death. Suddenly he appears before the Prophet and declares his belief in Islam. What does the Prophet do? Does he seek guarantees? What if Umar be a pretender? What if he has only joined the Muslim camp to murder its chief? Is Umar sincere? He has only recently been rendering obeisance to the deities of the Ka'ba, practising the ritual of the idolaters and mocking the Muslim faith. The Prophet asks no question. He seeks no test. He imposes no terms. He devises no safeguards. Umar has declared his faith in the one God. That is enough. Muhammad does not presume to read Umar's kind, for Umar's conscience is a matter between Umar and his God.

Umar's reception has also set the manner of the reception to be accorded to new Muslims. A Muslim, by accepting Islam, may leave a family, a tribe, or a nation, he at once becomes a brother in a larger family, a more important tribe and a wider fraternity. No matter what

his status, his colour, his race, or his antecedents, he is entitled to sit down with the Prophet, or to eat out of the same salver, and offer prayers with the greatest. The Prophet's prayer to Allah for Abul Hukum-ibn Hisham, and Umar-ibn Al-Khattab sets another vogue in Islam,—the seeking out for Islam of the most intelligent, the most brave, and the most earnest. The Prophet is not concerned whether a certain person has detested or ridiculed his creed. If he is a man of character, a man of brains, a man with courage, he marks him out for Al Islam. Islam of the Prophet, therefore, is recruited from the best; the best attracts the best and establishes traditions which opposition cannot subvert, and centuries cannot disintegrate.

[8]

The sixth year since Muhammad was called as a Prophet has set in. The numerical strength of his followers shows a definite increase. Abu Talib, true to his word, still holds the wolves at bay; but the persecution of the rank and file is becoming intolerable. Abuse, assaults, and violence are matters of common occurrence. The Prophet's person is by no means immune. Abdul 'Uzza and his wife

PROPHET

Umm Jamil, who is the sister of the Quraish chieftain Abu Sufyan, have made him their special object of attention. Abdul 'Uzza follows him from place to place proclaiming that he is a liar and a blasphemer. Umm Jamil employs her dubious talents in spreading thorns and brambles in his way. The Prophet smiles. They will roast together in Hell, for this has been revealed. Abdul 'Uzza, therefore, earns for himself the unenviable sobriquet of Abu Laheb.

In these difficult times, Muhammad realises that he needs the services of every man, but like his God, he has a tender heart. It pains him that there is so much suffering on his account. If it were not for the divine mandate, he would quit the roll of Prophet. He looks back with regret to the happy carefree days of his youth, the early years of his marriage. He has no apprehensions about the future of the message which God has put into his mouth, for God would look after his Faith; nor does he care what happens to him, for God would look after him too. He is only profoundly concerned about the sufferings of his disciples.

The situation requires courage, but the decision is made. He resolves to spare as many

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

of his followers as care to seek sanctuary for themselves. Accordingly, his disciples—as yet not many more than a hundred—are individually called and advised to seek refuge in Abyssinia, which is ruled over by a conscientious monarch.

“In that country,” the Prophet tells them, “Negus, the ruler is an exemplary man and permits no one to be wantonly wronged. I am sure you will receive there tolerance, hospitality and a genuine welcome. Remain there till Allah is pleased to bring you home once again.”

A few days later two small batches of fugitives secretly set sail across the sea. The Prophet's daughter, Ruqayya and her husband, Uthman, are among the emigrants. On arrival at the palace of Negus they are received in audience and assured of protection.

But Uthman and his party had scarcely left Mecca, when the Quraish heard of the flight. Hurriedly they convened a conference, which read into this event a manoeuvre to enlist the support of Negus of Abyssinia. Unanimously they resolved that these tactics must be counteracted at once. Emissaries to Negus were forthwith appointed; and, close upon the sails of Uthman, followed Abdullah-ibn Rabi and 'Amr-ibnul 'As. Negus has a piquant contro-

PROPHET

versy to settle. The ambassadors of the Quraish demand the extradition of the Muslims for wrongs committed in Mecca against the religion of their forefathers, and for following a dangerous upstart.

"This crime would have been atoned, if they had become Christians," they add to win the sympathy of Negus.

The Meccan ambassadors have already secured the support of the local clergy, who are ever-ready to believe in heresy and to accept backstair reward, in return for services. The clerics therefore support the demand for the extradition of the Muslims. "Why should we arouse annoyance of the Meccan tribes unnecessarily?" they counsel their King. "No good can come from giving Muhammad's followers this asylum."

The King, however, against the wishes of his advisers and the Meccan envoys, sends for the refugees; and, in the presence of his whole court, questions them on their religion.

"What is this new religion, for which you have abandoned your gods, and adopted neither mine nor that of any other people?

Jafar, Ali's handsome brother, acts as spokesman of the refugees.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

"Your Majesty," says he "we were a people immersed in the depths of ignorance, we worshipped idols, we ate dead bodies, we were devoid of morals, we broke ties of kinship, we disregarded all feelings of humanity, the strong amongst us preyed upon the weak, we were bad citizens and bad neighbours, when Allah sent us a messenger from our own people, a man whose lineage, honesty, trustworthiness and chastity we knew. This man, Muhammad by name, son of Abdullah and grandson of our famous patriarch Abdul Muttalib, called us to Allah, and exhorted us to disassociate ourselves from the worship of stones and idols, and to worship the one God, the supreme God of the universe. He ordered us to be truthful, to faithfully perform our pledges, to observe ties of kinship, to be honest and just; he has forbidden us from blood, from unchastity, from preying upon the wealth of orphans, and from accusing falsely good women. He has enjoined upon us prayer, legal alms and fasting.

"We trusted him, and believed in his message, which he had brought to us from Allah, and put into practice the laws and the rules which he enunciated to us. And as our worship and conduct were so different from the

PROPHET

rest of our people, they became hostile to us and tormented us and sought to turn us from our religion and seduce us and drive us back to the worship of the idols of the Ka'ba.

"And when they persecuted and oppressed us beyond reason and tolerance, making it virtually impossible to practise our faith in peace, our Prophet directed us to seek your protection and the hospitality of your rule."

The King and others who are disinterested in the controversy appear impressed with Jafar's speech.

"Have you brought," asks the King, "anything that was revealed to your Prophet by Allah."

"Yes, your Majesty," replies Jafar.

"Read it to me."

Jafar draws from his jerkin a scroll. The King rests his face in his hands and listens attentively.

Jafar tells the king that he will read to him the *Sura* entitled *Maryam*. He begins: "*Bismilla-bir-Rebma-nir-Rabim.*"

The King enquires what this signifies.

"It means", explains Jafar, "that 'I begin in the name of Allah, the Beneficent and the Compassionate.'"

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Jafar proceeds thus: "*Kaf Ha. Ya. Ain. Sad.*" and verse by verse recites the revelation and explains its meaning. The Negus is charmed with the eloquence of the Koran.

"Why, this is so like the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth", he says, and turning to the crest-fallen 'Amr; "I am afraid, envoys of Mecca, I cannot give you back these refugees. They are free to live and worship as they please in my kingdom".

"We pledge our loyalty to you, O King", says Jafar.

[9]

The more followers Islam gathers, the more eagerly do its enemies seek the blood of its Prophet. There are further migrations to the kingdom of the Negus, only the Prophet and his immediate coterie remaining behind. Abu Talib is now genuinely anxious about the life of his nephew and induces him to seek shelter behind the walls of a strong castle, outside the city.

The Quraish demand of Abu Talib the surrender of his nephew, and, pending delivery, outlaw the whole tribe of the Banu Hashim. Abu Talib has no option but to betake him-

PROPHET

self and the rest of the Banu Hashim in the fortress for safety. As the decree of outlawry has been passed in the name of the Quraish as a whole, any alliance or communication with the Banu Hashim is forbidden to all Arabs. The orders of exile, it is made clear, will only be abrogated upon delivery to the resentment of the nation of the notorious and dangerous leader of the agitation. The proclamation is superscribed upon a parchment and fixed in the interior of the Ka'ba for all to see.

Muhammad has now been a Prophet for seven odd years. He is well in the afternoon of his own life, nearer fifty than forty. The lady Khadija is past the sixties—an old woman, but nevertheless a grand old woman. She is as devoted to her husband as she was twenty years ago. He was then a youngman, full of promise, influential, well-beloved, with the call of spring in his veins. He is now grey haired; years and events have furrowed wrinkles in his brow, he is an outcast, an outlaw; the most hated man in Arabia; a fugitive from the fury of his own kinsmen. Seven years as a Prophet have not been conspicuous for promise or success. He has gathered some followers, he has raised some dust. According to wordly stan-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

dards, however, his movement is unpopular and generally unsuccessful. But have his failures and shortcomings made any difference to Khadija's belief and faith in him? Is she ever in doubt as to the ultimate result of his mission? The years, on the contrary, have added to her conviction of his ultimate success, which, even though it may not arrive within her life-time, she is sure will result in a momentous triumph for Islam. She is Muhammad's haven in disappointment; she is the standard bearer of his heart; she gives him what few women give their husbands—she gives him encouragement, when the world offers reasons for despair, she gives him love when the world gives him hate, she is proud of him when the world mocks at him. Muhammad too is deeply attached to her. She has taken possession of a throne in his heart that no woman will ever usurp. She is much more to him than a devoted wife or a fond mother to his children. She is the citadel of Al Islam, his mission and his destiny.

[10]

Another three years roll by, long stretches on the roads of time—long enough to shake all except the most confident of determinations.

PROPHET

Three years of exile, inhospitable habitations, privation and want. Al Islam is at a standstill. The Quraish have successfully circumscribed its ambit within the ravines of the 'Shib. It is only during the sacred months of the Pilgrimage, when violence is sacrilege, can the Teacher emerge from his refuge and seek a hearing. Even on these occasions he is followed from place to place, by the irrepressible Abu Laheb, who denounces him as a liar and a sbean. While the people of Mecca steal their hearts against God and his messenger, the Prophet, however, gains some eager listeners among the pilgrims particularly from those hailing from the city of Yathreb.

While the ban still subsists and the tug-of-war is at its height, the Quraish are still anxious, for many reasons, to avoid an open conflict. The ban has ostracized the entire tribe of the Hashimite. The exile of Muhammad alone might have been popular, but there has been resentment against the outlawry of a whole clan, many of whom had close ties of relationship among other tribes of the Quraish, and who were guiltless of the doctrines preached by Muhammad. But on the other hand, the ban would not be effective unless it was

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

applied to the entire tribe to which Muhammad and Abu Talib belonged. Sitting on the horns of this dilemma, the Quraish want above all to avoid an internecine war among themselves. So they make another attempt to solve the problem. Where persecution has failed they think material allurements may succeed.

One day, as the Prophet is sitting in the Ka'ba a little removed from a group of the hostile chiefs, one of them, 'Utba-ibn Rahia comes over to speak to him. Says 'Utba: "Muhammad, I knew your father, we loved one another as brothers. You, as Abdullah's son, have therefore distinction in your birth. We know you too for your own qualities; but you have sown seeds of dissension among your people, and raised strife and controversy in the midst of happy families; you denounce our gods and goddesses; you tax our ancestors with impiety. We have a fair offer to make to you. It may well be worth your while to accept it".

"What is it?" asks the Prophet.

"If your ambition is to amass wealth by this affair, we undertake to collect for you a larger fortune than is possessed by any of us; if you seek honour and dignity, we are prepared to make you our chief and to render obedi-

ence to you; if you want dominion, be our king; if you want women, you may claim the fairest of our daughters. The only thing that we ask of you is to discontinue speaking ill of our gods and the religion of our ancestors."

"Is that all? Have you anything more to offer, O father of Walid".

"No", says the emissary of the Quraish. "Is that not enough?"

"It is, and it is not", says he Prophet. "For myself I want neither finery, power nor dominion. Neither do I seek women. I have been commissioned by Allah as a warner to my people. I deliver this message to you. If you accept it, you have felicity in this world and in the next; if you reject it, then Allah will decide between you and me".

"Utba returns to his colleagues disappointed.

One of the major factors of Muhammad's moral success, during the years of his tribulations, has been his spotless honesty and regard for truth. He has claimed to be no more than a messenger, a very mortal messenger of clay and blood. He has claimed neither kinship with God, nor set up as the incarnation of some

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

deity. He has expressed no ambition to be recognised for any virtues other than those purely human. He has sought to exercise no dominion or magistracy. He has been content to deliver God's message as he has received it. His pride is that he has been recognised as the messenger of the Omnipotent.

People are accustomed to look for miracles as an evidence of the speciality of divine recognition. Jesus of Nazareth performed, it is related, all manner of miracles, he upset all the laws of creation, he raised the dead, walked upon the sea, washed sins and turned bread into flesh and wine into blood. The commonest saints and recluses have cured the sick and foretold coming events; their blessings have made the impotent fertile, their curses have upset monarchs and destroyed kingdoms.

Muhammad's sole challenge to his world is to produce another book, nay a single line to match the grandeur and magnificence of the Koran, which has been revealed to him. To its authorship, he lays no claim; were it not so, his people would be ready to acknowledge him as the masterpoet of all time.

To miracle seekers and disbelievers his answer is plain and unequivocal: if mankind

PROPHET

and all the spirits of the universe should assemble to produce the like of the Koran they cannot produce the like, though they helped one another to do so. God has not sent him to work wonders; he has sent him to preach. "Am I anything but a mortal messenger?" he asks, and himself furnishes the answer, "If there were angels walking the earth, we would have sent down from Heaven an angel as a messenger. We have sent you, Muhammad, only as the bearer of good tidings and as a warner". He frankly recites this passage of the Koran to those who would give him credit for more than what he seeks. He is explicit that he has never said that Allah's powers are at his beckoning, or that he knows the secrets of nature, or that he is an angel. Over and over again he expresses his impotence to help himself, unless it so pleases his Master.

He is sometimes told: "We will not put faith in you, till you cause a spring to gush forth from the earth, or you have raised date-palms and dates, and cause streams to gush there abundantly; or you cause the heavens to fall in pieces; or you build a house of gold, reaching up to Heaven and ascend and bring us from there a book that we can read". To those who

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

want such signs and evidence of God, he indicates the whole of creation in answer. Man the animals, the alternations of night and day, the vast movements of the universe, the gifts of all-Bountiful Providence,—in gardens, streams and mountains, the golden sunset and the starlit night—speak in eloquent accents of the presence of the Supreme.

[11]

Sometimes humility is a cloak for vice. Is Muhammad genuinely conscious of his mortal status, or is he intoxicated with the divine recognition that he has received, the admiration and adulation of his followers? Since he has been called to deliver the Koran, has he ceased to be a man as other men go? Has he become infallible? Has he been lifted above the plane of humanity, and assumed the status of God's viceroy?

Two instances will indicate that the Prophet has not lost the human touch. For all his divine mission, he is still one of us, prone to our weaknesses and shortcomings.

He was one day preaching to an elite Meccan congregation, and eagerly explaining his mission, its characteristics and its purpose.

PROPHET

There was a blind man in the audience. Perhaps he missed a word, perhaps he arrived late, perhaps he lost the point, he interrupted the Prophet. The Prophet was irritated. A frown passed over his forehead. The bystanders silenced the intruder, and the Prophet continued with his discourse.

The occasion was trivial, the irritation easily understandable. But God is just, and there are no special liberties permissible to his Prophet. Forthwith came the divine rebuke in the *Sura* entitled *Abasa*. "The Prophet frowned and turned away because a blindman interrupted him. As he was addressing those who had no need of the Prophet, and some one came who was striving hard, and who feared: from him he turned away."

Was this a voice from the Prophet's own heart? Was this repentance or something more than repentance? It is known, the Prophet loves the weak and the poor. He might be sorry for his inattention. He might be sorry for his hastiness. But the verse of the *Sura* goes further, and amounts to a rebuke administered to the Prophet, a rebuke immutable for all time, a rebuke to testify to divine justice. Muhammad, in proclaiming the revelation,

gave another proof of his honesty, even though it amounted to an eternal verdict against him. Cheerful submission to the will of Allah is the keynote of his life; the incident was admired as an evidence of the Prophet's self-effacement in the submission to the divine will.

The second occasion, upon which there is a seeming lapse and display of human weakness on the part of the Prophet, is when he finds persecution bitterest, his following scattered, and the whole of his well-beloved Mecca up in arms against him. It is reported that he has made a concession to his enemies, and recited to the Quraish a revelation in which there is a respectful reference to the three principal Moon Goddesses of the Arabs,—Al Hat, Al Uzza and Manat,—and which also asserts that their intercession with God may be hoped for. The Quraish are delighted, they bow down before Muhammad's God and worship Him. All that they have sought in these years of controversy is that Muhammad should render respect and honour to their gods, and at least admit them to a junior status in the God-head. Mecca is again united. Muhammad is a hero. He is the pride of the Quraish, the idol of the people.

But Mecca's joy is shortlived. Muham-

PROPHET

mad soon discovers that he is a victim of a trap by the devil. A delicious deception foresooth, honour, fame and civic importance. But having discovered the error, does temptation delay his return to truth? Is there any bargaining, any compromise, any flirtation with truth? Is the price of Meccan loyalty any consideration to leave well alone? Does he not realise that recantation will adversely affect his reputation? Will it not augment the bitterness of the Quraish and the severity of the persecution upon himself and his tribe?

Whatever the probabilities and consequences, Muhammad has no hesitation in declaring that, any association of the gods of the Ka'ba with his supreme God, would be the work of Satan. "They are but names," says he, "empty names, which you and your forefathers have invented, and for which man has received no warrant."

Muhammad's lapse is doubtful, but even assuming it correct, his speedy and uncompromising recantation has not only restored the ground he has lost but added fresh glory to his character.

Upon the declaration that the Daughters of the Moon are empty figments of the imagin-

ation, the persecution of Muslims is renewed with redoubled vigour.

Hostilities continue between the two parties for yet another year. Each side enjoys but indifferent success. The Hashimites are imprisoned in the 'Shib and so too the Prophet and his immediate followers. All roads are watched by the enemy. Were it not for some secret sympathizers, starvation would overtake the exiles. Only during the sacred months do they enjoy any liberty.

The refugees in Abyssinia pray for the deliverance of Mecca from its gods. And, as if in answer to their prayers, a rumour spreads that Mecca has embraced Islam. Immediately thirty-three fugitives re-embark for Arabia. They cross the sea and are about to disembark, when they learn that the rumour is false, and that Mecca is still pagan.

An unforeseen event, however, suspends the controversy. The parchment pertaining to the orders of exile has been eaten by a worm. The malicious say that Muhammad has contrived this, but the faithful are convinced that it is a significant indication of the divine will. The news of the phenomena makes a widespread impression. Muhammad tells Abu

Talib "Uncle, Heaven has given victory to a worm over the decree of the Quraish. All the injustice and violence to which the writing was testimony has been eaten up by a worm, only the name of Allah has been respected."

Abu Talib seeks the leaders of the Quraish: "If what Muhammad says is true, you must raise the sword of vengeance on our tribe and extinguish the fire of your hatred. If he is an impostor, and what he says about the parchment is not true, I will hand him over to you to do with him as you will."

The leaders of the Quraish accept the wager. They arrive at the Ka'ba in great haste. A large crowd gathers. Everything is as Muhammad has described: the whole of the writing has been worm-eaten except Allah's name. Abu Talib is delighted. The orders of exile are abrogated. The Banu Hashim are greeted at the gate of the castle by their friends and relations, who lead them joyously to their homes. Great rejoicing prevails among those in immediate association with the Prophet and his disciples.

The joy of the Banu Hashim is unfortunately shortlived, for Abu Talib, who has lived the fullness of his years, is taken seriously ill.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

It is realised he is on his death-bed. He has not been a Muslim, but he has been the foster-father of Muhammad and the shelter of his prophethood. If the Quraish have spared Muhammad any insult, it is on account of Abu Talib; if they have been loathe to take up arms in defence of their faith, it has also been due to Abu Talib. Muhammad has had from Abu Talib more than a father's devotion. He has not been able to convince him of his mission, nor to wean him from the tribal pantheon. But he has not fallen in the patriarch's eyes. Abu Talib and the rest of his kinsmen have been in the most favoured position to judge Muhammad's character. . They have had the most advantageous position to scrutinize his motives and to survey his conduct. To them Muhammad has at times appeared self-opinionated, he has at times taken an exaggerated view of certain nocturnal disturbances, but they can still vouch for his honesty, his sincerity and his self-effacement. Abu Talib, therefore, is neither surprised nor offended when he is, in his last hours, invited by the Prophet to declare his belief in Islam. The old man smiles at the Prophet affectionately. Muhammad may be the Prophet of Allah divinely appointed, but, to

PROPHET

Abu Talib, he is still dear Abdullah's fair boy, who used to play upon his knees and climb upon his shoulders.

"Muhammad," says he, "I would willingly accede to your wishes, but I would not like the Quraish to believe that I have become a Muslim for fear of death alone."

Abu Talib's lips close firmly, and his chin pouts forward. It is yet another incidence of his force of character.

Thus, at an age exceeding eighty, passes away Abu Talib, mourned by believer and unbeliever alike, a man ripe in wisdom, of established incorruptibility, firm determination, generous mind, and dauntless courage. Wise, sagacious, learned in the lore of his country, scrupulously impartial, he had for two generations and more the confidence of all Mecca. He was in every way a worthy successor of his father, Abdul Muttalib, in the mantle of the patriarchy.

To the Prophet, the loss is more than that of an affectionate uncle. Abu Talib was the impregnable bulwark between the Quraish and their designs. So long as Abu Talib lived, the Prophet could be sure of the safety of his life and his immediate friends. But with Abu Talib

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

removed from the scene, the Prophet foresees an even gloomier future for his mission.

[12]

Muhammad's heart is heavy with the loss of Abu Talib. Only last week the great patriarch was a living entity—flesh, blood and comprehension. He talked of the past, he seemed confident of the future. Now he is dead, cold and stiff in his tomb, with heartless ants for company and dry hot sand for a bed. Muhammad thinks of all the years—forty and more—that Abu Talib has been to him almost a father and his eyes fill with tears. For Muhammad the Prophet is after all Muhammad a man.

But the year has a toll of other griefs to add. Not only is Abu Talib gone, but Khadija also seems to be nearing the end. She too is saying wild things, talking of the when she will have gone, plunging daggers into his heart.

In the courtyard Ali and Abdul Ka'ba are talking in anxious tones. Beloved Khadija is dying. Fatima is distracted. Muhammad knows the hours are few and precious. These are the last he will ever spend with Khadija. He grudges wasting any in sleep. It is a clear

PROPHET

mild night when the soul is conscious of its insignificance and impotence under the vastness of the starlit heavens. Above is the crescent moon, whose silver reflection on dome roof are like scattered petals in the sea. The soft sigh of the wind sounds like the echo of their own hearts agony. It is a scene such as the Prophet has often looked upon and enjoyed in the happiness of love and life. It brings back tender memories; it recalls the days when, in the first flush of youth, he espoused his beloved Khadija and they had set out on their lives' voyage, with not a thought for the troubled future; it brings back the incidents dear to both of them, —the births of their children, the hours of mutual confidence and the gentle words of love. Muhammad retraces the steps and obstacles they have surmounted, the perils they have run, the way they have travelled hand in hand. He has still her hand in his. It is now full of coarse wrinkles, but he finds it exceedingly soft and warm. He is looking into her eyes. His eyes tell her all she means to him and the poignancy of his grief.

Khadija feels her lids grow heavy. Her mind begins to wander, and, in her dream, she sees Muhammad entering Mecca at the head of

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

a mighty army. There are sounds of drums and triumphant music. How quick and joyous his step is. She is in the doorway watching him come. A fair breeze caresses her hair. A thousand throats have raised *Allah-ho Akbar*.

Eternal rest has come!

CHAPTER III

FUGITIVE

Life flies headlong, hunted by illusions or chasing mirages across the horizons. The divine person is the prophecy of the scriptures, the unrealised hope of the human heart. However carefully history is scanned, we will not come upon this individual; we will come upon Apollos of form and prodigies of intellect; we will come upon good and excellent men, but our beatitude will wait in vain for the fulfilment of all these qualities in a single form. History has been perverted by the epic splendour that has grown around the traditional details of the death of a simple preacher from Galilee. But if the mind requires a victory over the senses, a force of character overbearing king and soldier, judge and jury, and which would rule all virtues, namely animal and mineral, blending with the courses of the sap of spring, rivers, winds, stars and the eternal forces of nature, a universal symbol acceptable to mankind, this has yet to be discovered. The nearest

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

approach to the ideal man is Muhammad, the Prophet of the Desert.

The mind is progressive, it detests repetition and every attempt in the production of a new and faired whole. In the fine arts, therefore, creation and not invention is the aim. In the landscape, the artist attempts to exalt nature, it is nature, not as he has seen it, but as he would have liked to have found it. Gloom is a trifle more dark and sunshine a shade brighter. His heart is mingling with the paints. He is employing symbols in use in his day and among his people. No man can quite emancipate himself from his environments or produce a mode entirely alien to the culture and spirit of his times. Be he ever so original, wilful, or fantastic, his work will bear traces of the air he breathes, the soil upon which he lives, and the thoughts amidst which he has grown.

But the quality of imagination is to flow and not to freeze. The artist does not stop amidst splashes of colour. His reds and his greens, the blues mingling with the yellows, all have a meaning, all are indicative of ideas; from the same old paint box, the worn out brush, the familiar paints, he is fashioning objects, which in turn are the exponents of his thoughts.

FUGITIVE

It is the birth of truth into the world, the offspring of the marriage of thought with nature, a child of the old eternal soul, a fragment of the immeasurable universe. It may be an idea, it may be a miracle, it may be a revelation; no frequency of occurrence can ever familiarize it. The enquirer is always left stupid with wonder. It inherits all that has existed, it dictates to the unborn.

And thus has the Koran grown, *Sura* by *Sura*, a miracle in diction, a revelation in truth. It traces its descent from all the prophets that have gone before: it is itself the last of the prophets. A new spring flowers among the doctrines of love and charity, tolerance and understanding. It sweeps away tribal patriotisms with tribal deities, it establishes the god-head as the *Rabul-Alameen*,—the Lord, the Creator, the Cherisher of the universe. The conception of the great Architect of the world is placed, once and for all, in fitting elevation. Distance, time, locality and race dwindle into the immaterial. The God of Islam is the God of all. He is no petty tribal god; He has no mundane partialities and idiosyncrasies; He has earmarked no chosen people; He has no predilections in architecture, or language; He is not

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

tempted by the fragrance of incense or repelled by the incidents of poverty. 'Whichever way you turn you see His Face.' His main qualities are His mercy and His compassion.

Burning and fervid are the passages of the Koran. "That is your Allah, your God. There is no other god but Him. All things owe their existence to Him, therefore, render homage to the power of Him, Who cherishes all that He creates. He perceives everything but cannot be perceived. The magnitude of His goodness and His knowledge surpass comprehension. He is the wonderful originator of the universe. He causes the dawn to break; He has made the night for rest and the Sun and Moon for reckoning; the stars that you might follow the right way; He sends you the clouds for rain and clusters dates upon the palm trees. He is the wonderful Originator of the heavens and of the earth". Not one passage, not one faculty. A thousand passages speak to His transcendental purity, His beneficence, His mercy; He is referred to as the Creator and the Destroyer; Preserver and Sustainer, the Refuge in affliction, the Hope in despair, the Rewarder of good, the Chastiser of evil, the Irresistible, the Incomprehensible, the Ultimate Fount of all life, the

FUGITIVE

Infinite and the Supreme.

The Koran is growing not merely as a compendium of praise for the Almighty; it is also growing as a code of morality regulating the dealings of one man with another, as a torch over life's tortuous pathways.

Make the best of all things; avoid the foolish; let not Satan tempt you to evil; seek refuge in God; touch not the goods of an orphan; nor kill your children for fear of want; covet not another's goods; reverence the womb that has borne you; do not commit fornication and adultery; keep your eyes from lust; let women make no display of ornaments save to their kindred; abstain from vanity; give alms; offer prayers; show kindness and respect to your parents; avoid iniquity, whether open or secret; be neither unjust nor violent; seek the pardon of God and turn to Him, for He is merciful and loving; call upon the Lord in loneliness and in secret. These are in brief some of the behests of the Koran.

Nor is the potency of prayer overlooked. "Recite that which has been revealed to you of the Book, and be constant in prayer, for prayer truly keeps one away from evil and that

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

which leads men astray. The remembrance of Allah is your most sacred duty.

Long, grandiose and complicated supplications are not ordained. Simplicity is the keynote for prayer in the new faith; it is intended as a means of moral elevation and purification of the supplicant's heart. The Prophet gives himself no special status, he creates no priesthood, recognises no monopoly of spiritual knowledge, sets up no corporation or church as intervener between man and his God. Every man is made his own priest before God. As he is no better and no worse than others of his kind, God and His creatures are put into direct communication with one another. No sacrifice, no ritual, no incantation, no mechanical device, no fragrance, no temple, no altar is needed to bring the willing heart to the bosom of its comforter. The sand and stones of the desert, the bank of the rippling brook, the shade of the tree, anywhere upon God's earth or under His blue sky, such is the temple that Muhammad sets up for Islam, and the religion that he preaches to his race. Such is the temple that the Quraish have discarded and about which the persecution continues.

FUGITIVE

[2]

The tenth year of his mission as a Prophet has set in. There is yet no indication in the change of his fortune. His loyal companions are scattered in different places. Some have sought shelter under the friendly aegis of the ruler of Abyssinia. Some have left Mecca for unknown destinations in fear of their lives. Abu Talib and Khadija are dead. The hatred of the Quraish burns fiercer than ever. Ties of blood have long been forgotten. The gods of the Ka'ba are at war with God. Man and fate seem to be in league.

In this gloom does the Prophet loose heart? Does he call out in agony to his God demanding why has He deserted him? Does he lose confidence in his mission?

In clarion tones of supreme confidence he declares, "Now surely the friends of Allah shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve." To him however strong the opposition, however dismal the outlook, victory must nevertheless follow, for Allah is at war and Allah is invincible. The Muslims of his day, and even himself, may be extinct, but Islam must triumph. He is as fervent and convinced as ever that "for those

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

who disbelieve and the Polytheists there are but the fires of Hell."

"Harken!" says he, "O Unbelievers! I do not serve that which you serve: nor do you serve Him whom I serve: nor am I going to serve that which you serve: nor are you going to serve Him whom I serve. You will have your recompense and I will have my recompense."

If genius consists in a greater aptitude for perseverance, the Prophet is a genius *par excellence*. No matter how great the discouragement, how difficult the task, how long the struggle, Muhammad's perseverance in his mission knows no respite or abatement. His faith in the God of Islam is unshakable. In every blade of sunlight, in every fleeting cloud, in every fugitive thought, he sees the tangible manifestations of the Creator's omnipotence. Every peak upon the hillside points like a finger to the truth. Death, suffering or failure, by worldly standards, have no terror for him. He is fearsome only of the account he will be called upon to render. He is inconvenienced that he has been selected to convey the message of the One God. To this purpose he has consecrated his efforts. Life itself to him is but the means to

FUGITIVE

the end; the means and the beginning to all things being God.

And thus, oblivious of the vicissitudes of fate, he pursues his appointed task.

Ta'if is among the more important towns of Arabia, situated about twenty leagues from Mecca. The Prophet has liked Ta'if since his merchant days. Here he did good business for Abu Talib and Khadija and the people treated him with hospitality. It is, in many respects also, an attractive place,—its surroundings are fertile, it is easy of defence in case of attack, its inhabitants are brave and industrious. Perhaps, if Mecca has shut its ears, Ta'if may accept the message of Islam and provide an asylum for its Prophet.

Muhammad arrives here with the faithful Zaid and presents himself before the city assembly, boldly proclaiming his message. In particular, he addresses his remarks to Masood and Habib, sons of Amr. He draws a magnificent picture of the powers of his God and the marvels of creation. He adds with confidence; "I, Muhammad, am His messenger, and He, Allah, has wished me to preach Islam to you." The response, however, is unencouraging.

"If God wanted to convert us, he could

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

do it without your assistance," says one of the assembly.

"As for me," adds another, "I will not refute your arguments: for, if you are truly the Apostle of God, you are too important a personage for a mere mortal to measure you in discussion. If, however, you are an impostor, you deserve no reply from us."

The Prophet silently walks out of the assembly. But the people of Ta'if are not content with having repulsed him with ridicule. They follow shouting: "Get out you fool. Get out of here." He is soon pursued by a mob, who pelt him with stone and brick. He flies for his life, chased by an angry crowd,—a crowd to whom he has afforded no occasion for annoyance.

Eventually Zaid and he find refuge in an orchard, where Zaid wipes the blood from his master's face and ties the bruises on his legs.

And as they are discussing how best to return to Mecca, by camel or by foot, a slave, Addas by name, appears with bunch of grapes for the Prophet.

"Who sent this?" enquires the Prophet.

"Utba-ibn Rahia, my master," replies Addas, "and the owner of this orchard. He

has taken pity on you.

"Thank him," says the Prophet, and stretching his hand towards the grapes, puts a few in his mouth, after whispering "*Bismillah*."

Awhile later, Addas enquires: "And why did you say '*Bismillah*' before putting the grapes into your mouth?"

"*Bismillah*", the Prophet explains, "means 'In the name of Allah'." He then tells Addas the significance of the formula and of the duty of good Muslims to invoke Allah before sitting down to meals or commencing work,—for all success and happiness are fruits of Allah's bounty.

"Then your religion is very akin to ours," says Addas, who is a Christian. "What is the difference?"

"The difference, Addas, is explained in the Koran, when it says: 'Say He, Allah is one, One on whom all depend; He begets not, nor is begotten.' He begets not, nor is begotten—that is the difference."

Addas becomes a Muslim.

While leaving, Muhammad shakes the dust of Ta'if off his feet. His heart is full: "Supreme Allah," he cries, "these indignities reveal to You my feebleness, the impotence of my zeal,

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

the hatred with which I am looked upon. I do not care for anything except that I enjoy Your protection and never incur Your wrath. O You, Whose compassion knows no bounds! You are the Lord of the feeble. May Your anger never be raised against me."

His words are significant. He does not complain, he is willing to continue in his duty. He is not despondent; he only regrets the impotence of his zeal. There is no compromise in principles or weakening of his determination. His fortitude is complete. He only wants the assurance that he enjoys the confidence of his Master.

[3]

Muhammad has returned to Mecca. It is the month of Al Kadr. His enthusiasm is as keen as ever. The feasts pertaining to the annual pilgrimage are being celebrated. Mecca is donned in festive raiment. Gay colours splash the busy thoroughfares. There are people from all quarters to celebrate the memory of Abraham and Ishmæl. Jews, idolaters and neo-Christians. The pilgrimage has also attracted a subsidiary concourse of traders, bards, minstrels and women, who offer fragrant bodies for

silver dirhams.

The populace is cosmopolitan; its mode is receptive. It is a great opportunity for charlatans, peripatetic entertainers and itinerant mendicants. It is also an excellent opportunity to gain publicity for a backward creed. No harm can come, for the months are sacred. Good is possible.

And so the Prophet fully utilizes the opportunity. On the roads, in public places, everywhere he is to be seen moving swiftly about, gathering audiences and raising his voice against the false gods of the Ka'ba. "Children of this illustrious house", cries he to various Arab tribes, "I am the Apostle of Allah. He commands you to worship Him, and to delete from His worship all that which does not belong to Him, to believe in my mission and to attest to the truth thereof".

The Meccans know him and smile. They have heard all this before. Their hearts have become immune to the infection. But the strangers in the city are stirred with the magic of his voice. They see his dark eyes alternately ablaze with fire and soften with tears. Many are willing to concede that whatever he may be, whatever the merit of his doctrines, he is

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

undoubtedly sincere. They find him a man, against whom no one can lay a charge of worldly ambition, who does not screen his doubts in formulas, and who is awake to the mysteries of life and the reality of things. In his message they find a touch of the divine.

For eleven years Muhammad has played the frenzied music of his soul. Except to a few listeners, it has been a discord, a disharmony, a clash of muddled notes. This is the first occasion when his eloquence is striking sympathetic chords. It is the first occasion when little children run to listen, when the prosperous and firm feel disheartened, and the despondent feel hopeful. Listeners want to hear more, and bystanders do not wish to depart. His discourse is fascinating to them all. He is finding the confidence of men. The face of the world may now change.

Amidst these fervent preachings, the Prophet comes upon, one day, six men from Yathreb. Towards dusk as he is weary of the days labours he finds upon a rocky promontory of Mount Aqaba six white figures like the ghosts of evening. They are talking earnestly. He presents himself to the strangers and finds they are from Yathreb upon the annual pilgrimage to

FUGITIVE

the Ka'ba. They are attracted by his address, and speech; and recognise in his voice the urbanity of the Quraish. They are interested in what he has to say about the city they are visiting, the people they see, the functionaries who preside. He knows them all intimately—that is obvious. He must himself be a man of some consequence, and this is as they suppose.

He tells them something of himself and his mission, the persecution to which he has been subjected, the fate of his followers. They listen to him with wrapt attention.

The Prophet finds that his words are making an impression, he lingers awhile, seeking a chance to recite the Koran to them. As a Quraish he would be expected to speak pure elegant Arabic, but here is Arabic the like of which they have not heard before. So this is the man of whom whispers have floated down the caravan routes to Jerusalem and Damascus! So this is Muhammad the last of the Prophets, the claimant to the mantle of Abraham and Jesus!

Yathreb at this time is divided between the Awasin and Khazrejin. The six men, who sit round the Prophet listening to the message of Islam, hail from the latter, who in turn are allied

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

with certain neighbouring Jewish tribes. They have often heard their friends, the Jews, speak of the advent of a Messiah. In fact the Jews look forward to three Prophets—Christ, Elijah in his second advent, and a Prophet 'like unto Moses'. They have had John and Jesus; but one was sacrificed to a courtesan's passion, the other crucified like a thief. It is, therefore, possible, (the men of Yathreb feel) that one of the three Prophets due has arrived. It may be the prophecy of Moses—"I will raise them up a Prophet from their brethren like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth"—is confirmed in the claimant from Mecca; or, perhaps, it is Isiah's prophecy and not that of Moses which has come true; perhaps it is neither of these and it is Jesus' recommendations that have been accepted: "If you love me and keep my commandments, I will pray to my Father that He should give you another Comforter". Not that any one in particular has kept Jesus' commandments, but it may just be that the Comforter has been sent all the same.

In any case, whether Muhammad be the promised teacher or not, the men of Yathreb are firmly convinced of two propositions: firstly, that their country is in dire need of a

FUGITIVE

master, who would unite it under one banner, a man of courage and determination, a man of truth to eradicate the many evils that disgrace their social system. Secondly, they are equally convinced that they have found the right man, and that man is Muhammad, the Meccan. They are, therefore, eager to return to Yathreb and to proclaim the advent of Muhammad and the message of Islam.

[4]

Khadija's loss still bears heavily on Muhammad's mind. For twenty-five years he enjoyed the comforts and companionship of the married state. Many men and women find marriage a failure; his has been an unqualified success, a happy confluence of mind and body. But he has always been something of a lonely man; his loneliness is more pronounced now. From his preachings and introspections he returns to a home bereft of the warmth of Khadija's care. His children run to him. They look a little unkept, they have troubles and difficulties of which he has never heard before; they have no mother now. He is persecuted and oppressed. True, he has faithful friends in Abdul Ka'ba and the stalwart Umar, but no

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

man's kindness can replace a woman's tenderness.

To his disciples Muhammad is not merely a Prophet, he is the dictator of their lives. They have not only surrendered to him their allegiance, but they have made a gift of their hearts. They seem to share his loss. They know what Khadija meant to him; they feel that upon his happiness and peace of mind, above all, depends much of the movement. Men find in him a man in the fullest sense of the word,—not a sickly sentimentalist, but a man of action, determination and redoubtable courage. Women admire him for all the qualities admirable in him to their men-folk, with the additional something that is a secret in every woman's heart. It is suggested he should remarry.

Who is it to be? Several fair ladies have, it is known, tender admirations for the Chief of Islam. There is Sauda, the widow of a young earnest follower, who died not long ago in Abyssinia and left his wife destitute. Her husband, at one time, was a man of means, but he left his worldly goods behind, when he took the road to Islam. There is also Ayesha, Abdul Ka'ba's little girl. Abdul Ka'ba is the ever faithful ally of the Prophet. Indeed, if the Prophet

FUGITIVE

is the brain of Islam, Abdul Ka'ba may be compared to its heart. In every word and deed the Prophet sees in him the ideal Muslim. Abdul Ka'ba is anxious to cement the bond of friendship through his beloved daughter. To the Prophet he has dedicated himself and all his wealth. For him he has sacrificed high public office and eminent status among his tribe. He sees in the fair Ayesha the beauty of her mother and intelligence of the Quraish. He desires the Prophet to accept this precious gift in token of their friendship and his faith in him.

Ayesha is yet, however, too young to be introduced to the mysteries of life. She is ten, and it must be about five years before she is old enough for the incidents of matrimony. But Abdul Ka'ba is anxious that the union should be sealed. So the nuptials between Muhammad the Prophet and Ayesha daughter of Abdul Ka'ba are celebrated to the rejoicings among all Muslims. Abdul Ka'ba now obtains a new position by virtue of his relationship to the Prophet. He is affectionately called by the Faithful *Abu Bakr*, or father of the camel's young.

Ayesha, for some years yet, is to be only a

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

wife in name. Sauda's problems are also solved, and the tribe is pleased when the Prophet espouses her. It is to no luxurious home, however, that Muhammad brings Sauda. For the most part he is a fugitive from the Quraish, moving from place to place, matching his ingenuity with the craft of his foes. His personal wants are frugal. His diet is barley bread and water; occasionally milk; now and then, a little meat. He mends his own shoes and patches his clothes; his mind seems absorbed with intricate problems. He spends much of his night in prayer,—the Koran has borne testimony to two-thirds of the night—and in contemplation upon the needs and wants of vulgar mankind.

At about this time, there comes to the Prophet a vision. One night, while lying in the valley between Mount Safa and Mount Merva, which overlook Mecca, he dreams that Gabriel has come and awakened him. The Angel is leading a silver grey steed upon which he directs the Prophet to ride. *Al Borak* the steed, Muhammad finds, has all the swiftness of the steeds of mythology, and, in a short time, transports its rider from Mecca to the gates of Jerusalem itself. Here the Prophet enters the Temple where Moses, Jesus and

FUGITIVE

Abraham are among the congregation. Having said his prayers, he remounts and upon *Al Borak* continues his journey through space. A while later he arrives at the First Heaven. As Gabriel knocks at the door, there comes a voice from within.

"Gabriel, who is your companion?"

"Muhammad", replies the Archangel.

"Has he received his commission?", enquires the voice.

"Yes, he has received it."

"Then he is welcome."

At these words the door swings open.

"This is your father Adam" says Gabriel introducing Muhammad to the first human-being. Adam bears testimony to the pleasure of those in Heaven with Muhammad's work and pats him on the shoulder: "My honoured son! You are the greatest of the Prophets."

Thus goes the Prophet through the seven Heavens receiving felicitations from the various prophets who have gone before,—Moses, Abraham, Jesus and the rest, until his wanderings bring him to a vast temple of red hyacinths, where seventy thousand angels render homage to the Omnipotent. From this temple he crosses an Ocean of Light, and is eventually brought

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

face to face with God. His heart pounds so fast that there is a danger of its breaking in two. He is commanded by the Almighty to pray fifty times a day and to direct mankind to do likewise. On the return journey, however, he meets Moses, who tells him to submit to the All High that fifty prayers a day are impossible of fulfilment by the human race. Muhammad returns and the mandate is reduced to forty. Moses again impresses upon Muhammad the futility of the decree. Two or three return visits are made, until the number of obligatory prayers is reduced to five.

The Vision creates an unseemly controversy among the followers of the Prophet. The more earnest read into it all manner of meaning, and, in particular, the divine confirmation of the law pertaining to the five prayers. A few genuinely believe that the Prophet was actually transported during the night over this journey. The less credulous are not willing to give it even the status of a vision. The Prophet's enemies find in it a useful implement to discredit him. "You see," says one, "he has been meeting God; he won't talk to us now."

"I like that horse of his", says another, "fancy, I could have my morning meal

FUGITIVE

here, my midday meal in Neptune and my evening meal in Orion."

"I wouldn't like to go to Heaven," says a third, "think of the seventy thousand voices singing night and day. Hell, if warmer, cannot be as noisy as that".

The Koran has referred to the Vision, so there is no doubt in the minds of the Faithful about the Prophet having had it. But what value is to be attached to it?

For the first time the Faithful are divided in controversy. The Prophet, on his part, has claimed nothing particular about his vision; nor has he attached much importance to it. But among his disciples, there arises a controversy of the first magnitude. Reason smites at sentiment, sentiment retaliates. For once Al Islam is shaken, and a strange vision nearly accomplishes, within a few weeks, what the Quraish have not succeeded in thirteen years. Abu Bakr, however, comes to the rescue and the troubled waters forget their fury.

While Mecca debates the vision of the Prophet, six men are reaping a fertile harvest in Yathreb. The seeds, which they sowed upon their return from the Pilgrimage, found fertile soil. And thus at the time of the next pilgrim-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

age, several of the new converts to Islam leave Yathreb for Mecca with the express purpose of rendering homage to the Prophet. They find him at Aqaba. And thus the same spot, where a year ago the six good men of Yathreb joined the Muslim ranks, sees a larger body of persons, from the same city, offer obeisance to the Prophet. They pledge not to associate any other gods with God, not to steal, nor commit adultery or fornication. They undertake to abstain from calumny and slander, as also the murder of children. They promise obedience to the teaching of the Prophet and loyalty to Islam at all times.

The Prophet deposes Mus'ab-ibn 'Umar to accompany the new Yathreb Muslims back to their city, and there to instruct them in the Koran and the principles of their new creed. Mus'ab is fervent and enthusiastic; he is eager to attract as many recruits as possible.

A few days after Mus'ab's arrival in Yathreb Osaid, one of the city officials seeks the Muslim preacher and questions him: "What is your purpose in coming here, Mus'ab? Have you come to reconnoitre the state of our forces? My advice to you is to quit the walls of Yathreb at once,—if, your life is of value to you."

"Sit down, and listen," says Mus'ab with no perturbation of any sort, He then tells Osaïd of Islam, the message of its Prophet and principles of its faith. He also reads to him passages from the Koran. Osaïd becomes Mus'ab's first victim.

Osaïd and Mus'ab then join forces to convert Sa'd, the Prince of the Awasin, who makes an excellent prospect for Islam. Mus'ab addresses a letter to the Prince in his most convincing manner: "Deign Sire to listen to me. If the proposition which I make out appeals to you, accept it; if it is at all irksome in the hearing, stop me at once". Mus'ab knows the prince as a good man, fond of justice, and a dissatisfied critic of his country's affairs. The astute Muslim selects, therefore, the grandest passages in the Koran, and others most suited to his purpose. As expected, he makes a profound impression. The Chief of the Awasin accepts the proffered faith.

Like most new Muslims, Sa'd becomes not merely a convert, he becomes a missionary. He is eager to propagate the faith, to persuade and convince others, even as he has been persuaded and convinced. Accordingly, he raises the question in the general assembly of the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Awasin. He talks to his tribal kinsmen of his doubts and how they were dispelled. He is enthusiastic about the wonderful and inimitable Koran. He tells them of his debates with Mus'ab, the intelligence of the Meccan emissary, and the satisfactory manner in which points in controversy have been answered. The Prophet, as Sa'd describes him, is a man free from Vanity and personal aggrandisement, who refused princely power in deference to spiritual duty, in all a man neither amenable to fear nor corrupted by ambition. He also tells his people of the urgent need, in which they stand, of a leader of out-standing merits to extricate them from their political and social stagnation.

"The time has come" says he, in eloquent peroration, "when deliverance should be at hand. Through the mouths of all the Prophets, from Moses to Jesus, we have been assured of a Prophet, who would rally around him the lost and the wayward of mankind. My friends and brethern, I see in Muhammad that man. Let us hasten to do the only right thing in the matter: let us become Muslims and bring him among us, and make him our chief."

Sa'da's zeal is infectious. His eloquence

FUGITIVE

and enthusiasm release a multitude of ideas and hopes. The new cult, therefore, spreads in Yathreb like an epidemic. Jews, Christians, idolaters, star-worshippers, Sabeans, Magis, Zoroastrians, magistrates and tax-gatherers, men of learning and little children, young and old, rich and poor alike are all alike caught by the fever. It envelops the city like a wild fire driven by a gale.

The torch of Islam lit on a memorable night, upon Mount Hira fourteen years ago, has at last found tinder in the simple hearts of Yathreb. The glow in the north tells the people of Mecca that their efforts are in vain. It is too late now. The torch has set the world ablaze.

[5]

It is a clear July night. A small pale moon is nodding sleepily to rest. A warm wind caresses the sand-hills, and the stars glimmer in a dull grey sky like the eyes of a myriad owls. In the *Dar-un Nadwa*, a conference is in progress. From the rich raiments and excellent sabres, it is evident that the leaders of the Quraish are in general assembly. Their grave countenances speak of the anxious nature of

their deliberations. The entire talent of the tribe is mustered strong. Among others, there is Uthman-ibn Talha, keeper of the keys of the Ka'ba, Abu Sufyan-ibn Harb, the commander-in-chief of the Meccan army; Harith-ibn Kais, head of the city finance. The assembly is guarded by the *Kaimmeb* of the chamber, Khalid-ibn Walid. The assembly is presided over by the sage Abdul Uzza-ibn Kossay. There is, in the midst of these celebrities, the implacable Abu Laheb. The hour is such as when most good Meccans are in bed, sound in slumber. But there is no sleep for the great to-night,—for time is precious.

Meccan spies have kept a close watch upon the outlaw. The Quraish are fully acquainted with his movements and plans. They are also posted as to the happenings in Yathreb,—the successful mission of Mus'ab, the activities of Sa'd, Prince of the Awasin, and the first pledge of Aqaba; they know also of the second mission from Yathreb, the secret meeting on Mount Aqaba, and the invitation to the outlaw from Yathreb, as of the perfidy of Abbas, who placed ties of blood before loyalty to his tribe and his gods. The Quraish are equally aware of

FUGITIVE

the second pledge of Aqaba and the exodus of Muslims from Mecca to Yathreb, including the members of Muhammad's family and those of his immediate friends. The spies have also brought in word that Muhammad is now alone in Mecca accompanied only by Ali and Abu Bakr. He will not stay long.

Abu Sufyan, Abu Jahl (formerly known as Jalaluddin) and Abu Laheb impress upon their colleagues that there is no time to be lost, for never has Muhammad been in their midst so absolutely defenceless,—he has now no powerful relations to protect him, no body of followers or members of his family at hand. Never has he been more unpopular among the people; never will his death give greater popular satisfaction. It is, however, at the same time, equally true, that if he escapes to Yathreb, he will have an important principality at his command, he will at once be established in temporal as well as in spiritual authority, and become a constant menace to Mecca. His now being alone among them is obviously a divinely inspired occasion.

The Quraish are unanimous as to the sentence. But who is to be the executioner? Among Arabs, blood is paid with blood. No

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

one is, therefore, willing to set his tribe at blood-feud with the Banu Hashim. Abu Jahl's brain is particularly fertile to-night. He says he has a suggestion to make. Of course, everybody is attentive. "The death of the imposter," says Abu Jahl, "is a matter of importance to all of us. My suggestion, therefore, is that each of our tribes should supply one stalwart for the purpose. When the imposter is found we should all fall upon him together. Thus no particular clan will in particular be responsible for his death. It will be the decree of the Quraish, executed by the Quraish. If at any time the Banu Hashim want blood-money, they can have it."

Applause greets the proposal. Abu Jahl has spoken up to his reputation.

There is nothing to delay the progress of operations. Every youngman in the gathering volunteers to rid Mecca of its scourge, for youth is guided by heart rather than head. Each tribe contributes its quota. Suitably equipped, Abu Jahl's men are posted around the house where Muhammad, the outlaw, is in hiding. The night is dark. Only the stars flicker feebly. All entrances of the house are placed under observation. A detachment is

FUGITIVE

posted to watch the adjoining roofs.

The eagle is in the net, blissfully unconscious of its fate; only the wakening light of morning will tell it that it has but a few moments to live.

In the faint purple of the dawn, the assassins see Muhammad's bed occupied. His familiar green robe lies carelessly tossed at its feet. The heart of Abu Jahl pounds with joy. Here now is the triumphant fulfilment of his plans, the vindication of his gods. It is still sometime before the sun is due to rise. Only the fleecy clouds above the hills have changed to pink.

"Come," he says to his companions, "we have waited long enough. Before the sun rises, let us rid Mecca of its pest."

Sabres flash, there is a rush; the door of the courtyard breaks in with a crash. Fierce and thirsty for blood, the Quraish surround the bed, they have been watching, and throw the green mantle aside. The figure in the bed turns and sits up. It is Ali very sleepy.

"What do you want?" says Ali, sulkily, feigning not to know.

"You know whom we want; we want Muhammad. Where is he?" they demand

imperiously.

Ali shrugs his shoulders: "Find him yourself," he tells Abu Jahl dryly.

"Hurry", shouts Abu Jahl, "search every corner of this house and then the road to Yathreb. We will get him if we have to search every sandhill of a hundred miles."

The fury of the Quraish knows no bounds, when they hear that their prey has escaped, especially as they thought their plans for his capture infallible. The *Dar-un Nadwa* sets a hundred camel on the outlaw's head—dead or alive. Abu Jahl's men speed towards Yathreb. Abu Sufyan musters his horsemen to search the country-side. Whole Mecca turns out in the man-hunt.

Muhammad, Muhammad, where is Muhammad? This is the question every one is asking every one else. Ali smiles, gathers his belongings upon a camel and sets out towards Yathreb. He has done his duty and risked his life for his beloved Master. They hoot him in the market place. Somebody says, "Kill him". But the people are too concerned in a hunt for the chief to wreck their vengeance upon a staff captain.

Muhammad, Muhammad, where is Mu-

FUGITIVE

hammad? This is the question every one is debating. Little Asma smiles as she carries a bundle of food across the fields. She is too small to be noticed. She knows where her father Abu Bakr is. There is a sly twinkle in her eyes; but she puts on a grave expression. Though she is eight she understands high politics.

Across the fields Asma meets Amir-ibn Fuhaira with his flock of goats. She runs up to him and catches his right hand by his little finger. He knows who she is and whither she is bound. Dusk is lingering a trifle longer, delayed by the young moon. Amir shuts his flock except one goat which he takes along.

By a lonely path across the hills they arrive at a cave known 'as Thauda. Asma turns round to see if any body has been following them.

"There is nobody, Asma," says Amir assuringly. Asma runs behind a rock, and, in the twinkling of an eye, has run into her father's arms and kissed him.

"Did any one come this way?" Amir asks of Abu Bakr, who in turn looks towards the Prophet.

"They nearly found us. They were just outside the cave soon after midday. We could

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

hear everything they said. As a matter of fact, they were just the other side of that rock, and how they missed looking round it I cannot say. I confess," Abu Bakr adds, "that I felt it was all over. I said to the Prophet, 'How can we fight them? We are only two.' 'Nay' said the Prophet, 'we are three; Allah is with us.'"

"And now you know He is with us," the Prophet interjects triumphantly.

"Yes, Master," says Abu Bakr a little ashamed that he should ever have forgotten this.

The goat provides milk for the refugees. Amir, and Asma stay awhile. When they depart, Abu Bakr makes himself comfortable for the night, resting his head upon a friendly stone. Muhammad prays for, no matter what the difficulty or disappointment, he has not lost his faith in the great Arbiter of all destiny. The Quraish have now done their best and their worst. They succeeded first in driving his scanty followers to Abyssinia, then out of Mecca to various parts of the country; him they have also driven into exile. Even as Muhammad prays they comb the country-side to kill him, having set a price upon his head. The confidence with

FUGITIVE

which he corrected Abu Bakr is testimony to the genuineness of his beliefs. All through, even when the outlook has been dismal, there has not been the slightest wavering in his belief, no shadow of doubt has crossed his mind. His enemies may have robbed him of everything, but they have not touched the fringe of his faith in God.

Three years ago, it was revealed to him: "And let not their speech grieve you, Muhammad, for power belongs wholly to Allah. He is the Hearer and the Knower of all things, and O Muhammad, set your purpose resolutely, as a man by nature upright. If Allah afflicts you with some hurt, there is no one who can remove it save Him, and if He intends good for you, there is no one who can repel His bounty. And O Muhammad! follow that which is inspired in you, and forbear until Allah gives judgment, for He is the best of judges." Waiting has not worn out his patience for has it not been revealed to him that "We too are waiting. Worship the Lord and put trust in Him for He is not unaware of what mortals do?" "Verily, the messengers of Allah have been mocked before, and long did I bear with those who disbelieved; at length I seized

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

them and my punishment was awful." In the midst of all his troubles, the Prophet is confident: "Allah will not fail in his promise to his messenger, for Allah is mighty and able to regulate wrong." "Endure you patiently, O Muhammad, your endurance is only for Allah. Grieve not and be not in distress because of what they devise."

Right to the end of his career in Mecca, Muhammad is, therefore, to be found rendering praise to Allah in the same grand confident tones, as he did in the earlier days of his mission. "Praise be to Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth, Who knows your secrets and your utterances, Who created you from clay. To Him belongs whatsoever rests in night and day. Messengers indeed before you have been denied, but they were patient under denial and persecution, until Our succour reached them."

Even though he is aware of the plot of the Quraish to slay him, and his small band of followers is scattered, his confidence is complete. In the last Meccan revelation before the flight, the first words read: "Successful indeed are the Believers." The last words are equally significant: "Now Allah be exalted, for Allah is the true king. There is no God save

FUGITIVE

Him, the Lord of the Throne of Grace. Therefore Lord forgive and have mercy."

And even as he is in prayer here, friendless save for Abu Bakr, Amir the shepherd, and little Asma, a handful against a mighty host, he is fearless of the morrow. It is Allah's message he is carrying; if he is killed, Allah will make other arrangements. It may be the coolness and calousness of fatalism. But fatalism is the fountain of courage. And even as he is in deep contemplation, there comes to him the assuring answer, "He who has given you the Koran for law, will surely bring you home again."

Into the late watches of the night, as is his wont, Muhammad prays. It is a momentous night in his life. The horsemen of Abu Sufyan are still scouring the neighbouring hills. There in the valley lies Mecca, softly sleeping. Muhammad looks down upon his shattered hopes, the city of his birth and his fondest recollections, the city of his kith and kin; he looks across and sees Mount Arafat and Mount Hira, where he loved to roam and pray; from his house he could see the last dance of sunlight upon the hills. There lies the city, from which he has been cast out, and from which he is now a

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

fugitive. Away to the north is Yathreb, the city of his hopes. He realises that, if he can get across there safely, a prosperous future awaits him. He deserves success if any one does, for fifteen years of his mission have been mainly barren in result. Thirty years back great things were expected of him. There is not much sand left in time's glass for these dreams and hopes to be fulfilled. But he would rather have had success in Mecca than in Yathreb.

In his mind's eye the Ka'ba beckons to him. Perhaps some day Allah will take him home to Mecca.

CHAPTER IV

REFORMER

Yathreb is all astir. The news has filtered across the desert that Muhammad the Prophet has left Mecca and is on his way. While the horsemen of the Quraish are combing the country-side for Muhammad, the horsemen of Yathreb are also scanning the horizons. Mecca and Yathreb both want him at this moment. Popular excitement in both towns is at fever height. Crowds stream into the country-side, asking every traveller, "Have you seen him?"

As Muhammad and Abu Bakr travel from the cave towards the sea, the scale-pans of destiny seem evenly poised, with death in one and a kingdom in the other. Once or twice on the way the flight appears doomed. Suraqa-ibn Malik, one of the best horsemen in Arabia, hears that the Prophet and Abu Bakr have been seen taking one of the less frequented routes by the sea to Yathreb. Suraqa spurs his horse and gallops away in pursuit of the fugitives, leaving his men behind. From a distance he recognises

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

the familiar figures of Muhammad and Abu Bakr. The latter turns round and, seeing Suraqa speeding at full neck upon them, his lance glittering in the rays of the setting sun, cries "Apostle of God, here is the enemy."

The Prophet is unconcerned: "Fear nothing, Abu Bakr, Allah is with us."

Then turning suddenly towards his enemy Muhammad greets him: "Suraqa, it is you!"

Suraqa's horse rears, and slips in a soft patch wet by the sea. Rider and horse roll in the sand.

The Quraish is amazed. He has heard of miraculous escapes; and thus, an ordinary occurrence leads to quite extraordinary consequences. Suraqa tells the fugitives that only their God could have saved them from certain death; that he now believes that Muhammad is a favourite of Allah; that he is, therefore, prepared to become a Muslim; and asks Muhammad to intercede with Heaven for him. When Suraqa's followers arrive they find their captain has surrendered to the outlaw.

Dismounting from his camel, the Prophet embraces Suraqa as a brother: "You are my brother," says he, "there will come a time when

you will, in the name of Islam, be decorated with the bracelet of the Khusrus."

The Prophet at last arrives at Kuba, which is a little habitation, an hour's walk from Yathreb. Here dwell several farmers, of whom Amr-ibn Auf is the most distinguished. It is the twelfth day of the moon and the eighth day of the *Hijrat*. He has spent five days on the journey and three days in the cave. Tribulation, persecution and outlawry are now matters of the past. A new era has opened for Islam. For the first time history is being reckoned from a flight.

The Prophet rests a few days here with Amr-ibn Auf. But is rest possible? Can a light remain hidden under a bushel, or a hero of the hour from his admirers? The populace of Yathreb do not take long in tracing him. The house of Amr is besieged by admiring crowds. For miles around, flashes the news that the new ruler of Yathreb has arrived. The leaders of neighbouring tribes come to offer him friendly greeting and the poor to look upon his face. For once in the annals of mankind, prophethood and kingship are combined in the same person.

Here too comes Ali, the hero of the flight.

The Prophet hesitated to leave Mecca before completing the purpose of his visit to the city, namely to restore to their owners, various things that had been entrusted to him for safe keeping. But Ali volunteered to perform this work insisting that, as the Prophet's life was in danger, he should leave. For three days Ali continued to perform the duty undertaken by him; in this, he was neither frightened nor hurried by the Quraish. His courage has won the admiration of friend and foe alike, as also a very general recognition as one of the purest and noblest figures among the followers of the Prophet. Ali's admirable submission to his leader could not be more eager and complete, if he had been a son of the Prophet's own body.

Muhammad's entry into *Al Medina*—for Yathreb has now come affectionately to be known as the '*Medinat-ul Nabi*' or the 'City of Prophet', or '*Al-Medina*', 'the City', for short—is all that could be anticipated. A glorious morning when nature wears a lively mood; a whole town gay and festive, with everyone anxious to contribute to the happiness of the occasion. Any discourtesy to Muhammad to-day would be interpreted as an insult to Medina, whose people regard the conspiracy of the Qu-

raish as a personal wrong to themselves. The triumph of Muhammad in successfully avoiding his pursuers is recognised as a divine confirmation of Medina's hopes in him. Every house is decorated; every woman wears her choicest apparel. The children run madly about the streets intoxicated with joy. It is a gay, joyous and variegated crowd that throngs the streets as Muhammad passes in procession. It is as if a conquering hero returns home, fresh from fields of glory. It is a welcome such as a Roman Emperor might envy;—it comes from the hearts of the people; it has not been manufactured by the local officialdom.

Many are the pressing offers of hospitality. Sa'd urges his claims by reason of the status he enjoys among the local chieftains; there is Mus'ab, who would be honoured to offer his hearth and home to his beloved Prophet. There is Umar, there is Abu Ayyub, who would feel equally honoured. Uthman's claims are based upon ties of blood, for he is the husband of Ruqayya, one of the Prophet's daughters. Some seize the bridle of his camel in order to lead it towards their houses. "Let it go, wherever it likes," the Prophet tells them politely, "it is a clever animal." The camel at last stops before

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

the stable of the sons of Amr. The Apostle descends and, passing through the crowd, goes in to stay with his disciple Abu Ayyub.

The Prophet expresses a wish to consecrate for Al Islam the spot, where he first set foot in the city of their mutual hopes. This spot belongs to two young chieftains. He sends for their guardian and offers to pay the market price. As the boys are rich, they wish to present the land to him. But the Prophet will not hear of accepting it as a gift, and pays the price. Here, begins the erection of the second temple of Islam,—the first having being started, a few days earlier, at Kuba.

Muhammad himself works upon the erection as an ordinary labourer. In every way he wants to prove that he is no better than the ordinary run of his fellow mortals. His example is encouragement and inspiration for Muslims in all walks of life to work side by side in the great task. Slowly and steadily the edifice rises, shaped by loving and devoted hands.

The turn of fortune is only an incentive to further labour. As the tree of Islam bears fruit, the Prophet spares no pains in making the best of the season, for success has not intoxicated him; power and dominion have made no impres-

REFORMER

sion. He is as loyal and humble as before. There is no self-exaltation, no self-opinionation. He is as accessible and obliging as ever. He continues to work with his own hands, mending his clothes, sweeping out his room, fetching stores from the market and feeding his camels. A quaint king to be sure, but the idol of his people.

No pleasures divert him from the pursuit of Islam, which still occupies his mind as the primary objective of his labours:—to unite the diverse interests of his disciples, to extinguish ancient jealousies, to establish fraternity and concord amongst Muslims, to eradicate social evils, and to destroy every vestige of idolatry. To this end he bends his energies, resources and influence. He has thought deeply upon the shortcomings of the social systems of his time. He has now the means and the authority to translate his opinions into laws, and the precepts of doctrine into the practice of daily life.

[2]

The reforms introduced by the Prophet within the first few months of his arrival in Medina deserve more than a passing reference.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

The problem of a mosque having been settled, the Prophet's attention is drawn to another question of no less importance—namely, the status of the refugees from Mecca, among the friendly but, nevertheless, alien people of Medina. The refugees, who are known as *Muhajerin*, claim precedence by reason of having been the first to embrace Islam, and to have sacrificed family and tribal ties in order to follow the Prophet. The Medinites, who are known as *Ansar* or helpers, maintain that precedence is due to them, as without their aid, the Prophet would still be without authority and dominion. Among the more emotional, the rival points of view make hot beds of debate. When the matter is eventually referred to the Prophet, he finds little difficulty in indicating a solution. In Islam, he tells them, there are no rules of precedence and all Muslims are equal as brothers. Accordingly he unites each of the *Muhajerin*, by a bond of brotherhood, to an *Ansar*,—a solution unique in the history of mankind. He orders every *Ansar* and *Muhajerin* to love and treat one another as brothers, the result being that each *Muhajerin* finds he is the owner of half the house, goods and possession of his *Ansar* brother. This might be expected to lead to

heart-burning among the latter; on the contrary, they are enthusiastic over the solution. In money values too, they soon find that they are not very much the losers, for the *Mubajerin* are traders by instinct and are able to market Ansar commodities more profitably than has hitherto been possible. Thus Medina exemplifies the happy society, —the fair division of labour and the fair division of the profits of labour. In order to be served, one must serve. Orderly society rests upon the control of the self-seeking elements, the promotion of mutual sacrifice and the encouragement of individual effort. Al Islam, as established in Medina, typifies all these principles for the Prophet's conception of society is very similar to his conception of God. The God of Muhammad, as we have seen, is no tribal God; he is not merely the God of Abraham and Jacob, he is the *Rab-ul Al-ameen*,—the God, Creator, Nourisher, Sustainer of all the worlds and of all mankind, believers and unbelievers, alike. Similarly the society set up by Islam is open to all persons, irrespective of distinction of colour, race or worldly goods. It is a brotherhood *par excellence*, a brotherhood such as the Son of God preached and which was left to

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

a Son of the Desert to establish.

Muhammad may be an admirable administrator in affairs pertaining to his own followers; but what is his attitude towards those who *do not* believe in his mission? Is the same spirit of tolerance and charity evident in his dealings with the Jews and the Christians?

It is some years now that the Prophet told the disbelievers of Mecca that he did not worship what they worshipped, nor did they worship Whom he worshipped, that he would have his recompense and they would have theirs, with Allah as judge between them. The turns in the kaleidoscopes of fate have made no difference in his outlook upon the world. He is still the *mere* messenger, in spite of the fact that he has now been appointed to perform other duties besides the main duty of clearing Arabia of idolatry. Power has made no change in his conceptions. His hearers may, now as before, accept or reject his message. If they accept, so much the better for them; if they do not, Allah will settle His own accounts with them. Muhammad, the Prophet, abides by his instructions.

An important section of the people of Medina are Jews, who participated in the welcome accorded by their city to the new Prophet,

but none too enthusiastically. Since the waters of the Sea stepped back for them, they have been scanning the horizons for the Prophet, who is to lead them back to lands of milk and honey. Several prophets have appeared from time to time; but of all these, they have been suspicious. While Muhammad was still in Mecca, they were half willing to believe that he was the promised Messiah, but they have since changed their opinions. They are now as suspicious of Muhammad as they were of Jesus Christ; perhaps more so, as Muhammad makes no distinction between camel driver and tribal chieftain. His doctrines do not mingle very harmoniously with their aristocratic notions as the chosen race. The Prophet realises their apprehensions and hastens to guarantee them all they desire in the matter of freedom of worship and to win their favour in other ways. In return he insists only upon loyalty to the City of Medina and to its citizenship. These matters are embodied in a charter, a document that confirms him in all his greatness.

"In the name of Allah, the Merciful and Compassionate. This is a charter given by Muhammad the Prophet to the Believers, whether of the Quraish or of Yathreb, and all individuals of whatever origin, who have made cause with

them. All of them shall constitute one nation." After reciting various rules to be observed by Muslims *interse*, the charter proceeds: "The state of peace and war shall be common to all Muslims; no one among them shall have the right of concluding peace or declaring war against the enemies of his coreligionists. The Jews, who attach themselves to our Commonwealth, shall be protected from insult or persecution. They shall have an equal right with our people to our assistance and good offices. The Jews and all those domiciled in Yathreb shall form with the Muslims one composite nation; they may practice their religion in the fullest freedom. The guilty shall be pursued and punished. The Jews shall join the Muslims in Yathreb against all enemies: the allies of the Jews and Muslims shall be respected as patrons; all true Muslims shall hold in abhorrence every person guilty of crime or injustice or disorder, even though the offender may be his nearest kin. In future all disputes between those who accept this charter shall be referred for settlement to the Prophet."

The religious toleration inaugurated by this charter is complete when extended to the Christians and Zoroastrians. To the former, the Prophet concedes rights in the following words:

"To the Christians of Nagrin and the surrounding territories the security of God and the pledge of his Prophet are extended to their lives, their religion and their property. There shall be no interference with the practice of their faith or religious observances; nor any change in their rights or privileges; no image or cross shall be desecrated. They shall not oppress nor be oppressed; but they shall not exercise the rights of blood vengeance as in the days of ignorance." To the head of a fire temple the Prophet writes: "This is a letter from Muhammad, the Apostle of God, to Furrukh-ibn Shaksan and to his family and posterity that they may have, regardless of which of them will turn Muslim or remain faithful to their present creed, the protection of God is on their lives and property in which they live, whether in the plains or in the hills. They shall not be treated unjustly nor oppressed; and those to whom this my letter will be read must protect them. They are entirely free in their possession of fire temples, as well as all the property attached to these temples. No one shall restrict them in the use of anything which is sacred to their religion and their society."

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

This tolerance towards other creeds by the Prophet is perfectly comprehensible, for in a hundred passages his God has revealed to him that salvation is not confined to Muslims alone. "To every one," says a recent *Sura*, "We have given a law and a way. . . . If it had pleased God He would have made all mankind one people, but it has pleased Him to do otherwise." The Koran goes further and adds, "There is a reward for whosoever has faith in God and does that which is right and good, whether they are those who believe (Muslims, Jews, Christians) or Sabeans." "For there is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is distinct from error. He who rejects false deities and believes in Allah has gained a firm handhold which will never break; for Allah is hearer and knower". The catholicism and charity in his outlook is equally evident when he takes up cudgels in defence of other world teachers. While for himself he claims the status of an ordinary man, for the Prophets, who have gone before him, he urges better claims; he defends them against their detractors, exhorts their virtues and in a majestic and comprehensive gesture declares them righteous and sinless. He establishes the veracity of Abraham and Joseph,

REFORMER

bears testimony to Lot's purity of character, and refers to Jesus as the Spirit of God, conceding to him every claim except any physical relationship. This reverence for the prophets of faiths other than Islam is an integral part of the religion proclaimed by Muhammad the Prophet.

[3]

In other matters too, Muhammad is making dramatic changes. The final words in the charter to the Jews has abrogated the ancient rights of Arabs to avenge blood by blood and settle feuds by the sword. In future, the Prophet is to arbitrate in all matters, in which vengeance has hitherto been the rule. While the right to use the sword is specifically restricted, its use is not abolished altogether. The Prophet recognises that, although the sword cannot usurp the place of reason or of justice, there may yet be occasions when it would be the highest duty to unsheathe it—such as when liberty is trampled under foot, or when freedom is at stake, or when justice has become a mockery, or hirelings maintain the seats of authority. A Muslim is also authorised by his religion to use the sword to save any temple dedicated to the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

worship of God from destruction, it being immaterial to what particular sect or denomination it belongs. He may also use it in self-defence, provided he sheathes it again whenever his oppressor shows an inclination towards peace. A Muslim is further allowed the use of his sword to establish freedom of conscience, irrespective whether the persecutor is a Jew, Christian or even another Muslim. Neither the Koran nor the Prophet furnish any authority to propagate the faith by the sword; any such propagation, therefore, in the Islamic law is unlawful. There is, equally, nothing to authorise wars of aggression.

The Prophet is uncompromising in matters of drink and games of chance, viewing them as the abominations of Satan. Nor, may the Faithful eat the flesh of the swine, nor of what is dead, or has been consecrated to other gods. It is also unlawful to eat the flesh of an animal that has been strangled, or knocked down, or has fallen down, or of which the wild beasts have eaten a part.

But it is no life of asceticism or austerity that the Prophet prescribes for the Faithful.

Salvation is not won by fasting or penance, nor by lying upon beds of nails, or by practising celibacy, or abjuring the joys of life—food, raiment, and the calls of sex. In Islam, a man is intended to go through life very much as God made him. He has been given eyes to see, a palate for taste, and senses of touch, smell and hearing. He has been endowed with feelings and emotions. He is in possession of reason, instinct and passion. He was made in the process of creation, and has been gifted with faculties for the continuance of his species. There seems to be no reason why, therefore, if the Creator had intended man to be a freak of nature,—sexless, passionless and devoid of the realisations of beauty,—He would have gone on manufacturing the wrong article. The irresistible forces of nature cannot for ever be blockaded; gigantic glaciers are torn asunder with the pressure of streams hemmed in; the wind changes the face of mountains. In everything, in every inch of the universe, there are processes at work that are beyond human control. When man makes an effort to be something that he was not intended to be and fails, he puts it down to the weakness of the flesh, in other words to a sin. He tries in many

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

ways to wash away these sins. He may go and bathe in sacred rivers or confess his 'errors' to his priest; he may embark upon a pilgrimage, or make pious resolutions for the New Year. In a sense it is not his fault entirely; for, pre-occupied with other problems, he has entrusted his spiritual affairs to specialists in the scriptures. These gentlemen too have to make a living; the longer the list of sins, the more prosperous is the living. Hence a plentitude of sins. Not that the priesthood or the nunneries exercise a different moral standard. Here, too, sleep some where they should not, drink more than is good for them, depart from truth whenever it is convenient, bear children out of wedlock, gamble, and take the Lord's name in vain. With the examples of bishops and rabbis before him, Muhammad has no use for a clergy. At their door he lays the corruption of mankind, for not only have they dethroned God and set up in His place imitation deities of their own manufacture, but they have also enslaved man's conscience to rapacity and greed.

Muhammad's effort, therefore, is to restore both God and man to their proper positions;—God as the one and only, man such as his Creator

intended. God and man have already been placed in direct communication with one another; and even as the Prophet does not undertake to intercede for any one, he makes God accessible to the multitude without restriction of time and place. The catalogue of sins in Islam is also reduced to a bare minimum; no ascetic penances, no abrogations of human faculties are required or recommended. Muhammad is not only a warner, he is also the bearer of glad tidings. "Eat of the good things of life," says he, "and render thanks to Allah." He also says, "O you who believe, spend of the good things you have earned, and all that which is brought forth from the earth." These precepts summarise a Muslim's outlook on life, who may, therefore, excepting within the narrow ambit of the forbidden, translate joy in its fullness, and eat to his fill of the fruit that an all-bountiful Providence has provided. These liberties bring out in the Muslim the appreciative and constructive faculties in art, literature and science; it makes of him a sociable fellow; it gives him a pride in his personal appearance; he is ready to spend what he earns, thereby making it possible for others to earn and spend; in all, he goes through life with a cheerful smile, for he

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

is getting from the flower of life as much of the sweetness as is possible. Islam, therefore, is very much the original and natural religion of man.

[4]

The same broad conception is discernible in Islamic rules pertaining to trade. The Arabs generally lead a nomadic life, obtaining their living from the rearing of camels, horses, cattle and sheep. But certain tribes are permanently engaged in commerce, and regularly ply the caravan routes, east and west. The Koran has hitherto spoken of the legitimacy of commerce in general, but the time has come to set at rest all doubts on important matters. Commerce is accordingly expressly permitted at all times, even during the Pilgrimage; but calls of commerce are naturally placed second to calls of prayer.

Emphasis is laid in the Koran on the faithful performance of contracts: "True believers are those who tend well their trusts and covenants." If parties to a transaction can trust one another so much the better; but if any of the parties is not content with the oral form a scribe should be asked to write down the terms of agreement in the presence of appropriate witnesses. But whatever form is adopted, the substance of the

REFORMER

contract is sacred. This is just as it should be, for in contract there can be no constraint, every person being free to live and work as he pleases. Just as there is no compulsion that he should be a Muslim, so is there no compulsion that he should contract to buy or sell anything. When he becomes a Muslim, he voluntarily accepts the code of right living laid down by the Koran and the Prophet; he enters into a contract with Allah to obey his laws. So too, when a person enters into a transaction with another man, he equals contracts to perform or forbear some act. In either case the higher moral law, common to all mankind, is that contracts should be performed.

In Islam, the contract with God is invariably oral and devoid of any prescribed formalities, the whole transaction being based upon the highest basis, namely, the good sense of the promisor. In contracts between one man and another the adoption of formalities is recommended. In all events, however, believers are ordained to "perform your contracts." In like manner the use of false weights and measures come in for the Prophet's reprobation. Believers are enjoined to use a full measure and a just balance, and there is woe to those who give

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

short weight. This insistence upon fair measure is a natural sequence upon the obligation to perform contracts.

But while the Prophet allows full latitude in the matter of contracts, he condemns usury in the severest terms, as there is no tiger, wolf or enemy like the usurious oppressor. There is no midway house or purgatory for usurers. Their destination is fixed—the fires of Hell, wherein they will abide for ever.

The Islamic laws err, if at all, on the side of generosity to the needy and the oppressed. Over and over again, the duty to give alms out of income is emphasised, as also fair dealing with the property of others, more especially of widows and orphans.

The same spirit pervades the enactments concerning the treatment of debtors. When a debt is contracted, it should be written down by the borrower or at his dictation, faithfully and accurately. According to the general law of contract, there is the fullest obligation upon the debtor to pay the debt within the time stipulated by him. If for any reason he cannot repay, then what is to be done? The lender is enjoined to wait for easier circumstances, or to remit the debt as alms,—the latter being declared

to be the better course. These rules, it will be observed, are in distinct contrast to the laws obtaining elsewhere. While the Koran recommends no punishment for the non-payment of a debt, under Roman law a debtor might be put to death for a breach of his undertaking to repay; according to the Old Testament, he may be reduced to slavery. The Hammurabi code was a trifle more human, permitting the debtor to work off the debt, and hand over his wife, son, and daughter for this purpose for three years. Christ came to fulfil the law of the Prophets, and, accordingly, the law as to imprisonment for debt was safe in his keeping. His behest to the debtor was; "Agree with thine adversary quickly, lest haply he deliver thee to the judge and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the last farthing."

All these reforms are important in themselves, but the most revolutionary changes have yet to come, namely those pertaining to the position of woman in Islamic society. The Prophet finds that among his own people woman is very much a chattel. She forms a part of her father's or husband's estate; a man's

widows descend to his heir, as the rest of his estate to do what he will by them. In certain tribes, particularly the Quraish and Kindah, female children may be destroyed. Among the Jews, the position of a daughter is a trifle better. She may be sold as a slave by her father, and, in case of his death, at the will and pleasure of her brothers. If she happens to be comely in appearance, she is, of course, a valuable asset in Jewish eyes. Christianity has not forgiven woman's original sin; for, if she had not been seduced by a serpent, mankind would still be in the garden of Eden in a healthful nudity, marvellously nourished on raw carrots and uncooked celery. Woman, among the Christians, is still regarded very much as the devil's gateway. At her door is laid the vamping of the Caesars, the corruption of Babylon, and the ruin of Troy. The fathers of the church are doubtful as to whether she may enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew, Luke, Mark and John are silent as to what the Master thought about her. In Persia, Rome, Athens, Alexandria, and throughout the Arabian peninsula indiscriminate polygamy is rampant. Christians, Jews, Persians, Zend-Avestaneans and pagan Arabs

vie with one another in the numbers and choice of their womenfare.

Far reaching are the reforms introduced by the Prophet. The notion of the original sin is consigned to the limbo of discarded theories. Every child, according to Islam, is born sinless,—that is to say, a boy and a girl are alike born without sin. No more is it necessary to regard woman as a product of the devil and to destroy her as a scorpion at birth. No longer is it axiomatic that woman was made for man and not man for woman. According to the Koran, woman is the twin-half of man; they are distillations of the same essence. To the Hebrews, who tell their women "thy desire is for thy husband and he shall rule over thee," Islam replies that "woman is the sovereign of your house," and "she has like rights as those of man,—the same is due to her as is due from her." The latter view-point is found embodied in the laws of marriage and divorce promulgated in the Koran. Marriage is settled upon a contractual basis,—capacity of the parties, consideration, offer, acceptance, and performance. The one-sided notion of sacrament is dissolved. A man, who takes a woman as a wife, must be old enough and fit enough to

enter into the transaction; the woman must be of age to consent to the union, and must have agreed to it. He, who wants a woman's body, must assure her against caprice, fickleness and want in old age: he must in other words set upon her a dower. The marriage formalities should be completed before witnesses of credibility. No complicated procedure is enacted for the dissolution of marriage. There is no need for collusion or perjury to obtain a divorce. As marriage is based upon contract, if there be a breach of contract or a failure in performance, the transaction may be dissolved. The view-point of Islam is, accordingly, both sensible and rational. But before divorce is effective, the balance of the unpaid dower must be paid up. A woman can equally demand her freedom with the surrender of her dower. After the divorce, the parties may come together again or remarry anyone else they please. But as inheritance is based upon paternity, any possible doubt in this direction must be avoided, and, therefore, after divorce a woman may not remarry until the prescribed period of three menses has elapsed. Widows may also freely remarry after a like period.

The Islamic recognition of polygamy is

permissible but unequivocal. A Muslim may marry up to the number of four wives, subject to the proviso that he acts equitably towards all. If he fears that he cannot deal equitably with them all, only one wife is lawful to him. When wives are divorced for wrong doing, believers are enjoined to ponder over the issues for four months, and if, at the end of this time, they still feel that they must seek the solution of their conjugal problems in divorce, it is ordained that they should put away their wives with kindness.

It is lawful for a Muslim to marry any other Muslim or a believer, (those who have been given scriptures before, e.g., Jews and Christians) and believing women whose husbands are unbelievers, when the former take refuge in time of war. Marriage is only unlawful between a Muslim woman and an unbeliever and among Muslims related in certain degrees of affinity,—a mother, a daughter, a sister, an aunt, a niece, two sisters at the same time, a foster mother, a foster sister, a mother-in-law or a daughter-in-law.

With all these latitudes for happy marriage, it is but natural that Islam should regard fornication and adultery as inexcusable. These offences are accordingly declared abhorrent to

man and God. Adulterers may not marry any other than adulteresses; it is equally unlawful for an adulteress to marry any other than an adulterer or an idolater. Such marriages are forbidden to believers. "Bad women," says the Koran, "for bad men, and bad men for bad women; for virtuous men virtuous women and for virtuous women virtuous men".

The Islamic law not only gives a woman property over her body,—as to whom it shall be given and on what terms,—but establishes her entire status in society in relation to the opposite sex. She is no longer a chattel, which may be bought and sold; she becomes veritably the sovereign in the house, the better twin-half. All barriers restricting her right to succeed to the property of male relations are swept away. No longer are widows excluded on the ground that they are a part of the estate to pass into the hands of their husband's heirs. No longer may daughters be excluded on the ground that, upon their marriage, they cease to be members of their natural families. Finally, no longer may male children be excluded because they are, as yet, unable to bear arms and to defend tribal rights and property. Thus, under the law of the Koran, sex and age are no longer dis-

qualifications. Wives, daughters, sisters and mothers, inherit in prescribed shares; a male taking the portions of two females in the same degree. No distinction is made between children of a free wife and the children by a slave girl, provided that the child's paternity is admitted. So too the child of a lawful wife, on the one hand, and an adopted child, on the other, are placed upon the same footing. Of a Muslim's inheritance two-thirds must pass to his heirs: he may will away whatever he likes, but no more than one-third of his estate.

These laws, if viewed impartially, appear just and equitable, considering all matters collectively,—the rights of the sexes, the rights of children *inter se* and against surviving parents, and the desirability of a right to dispose property by will, without permitting too much discretion to a testator, who may act against the interests of his natural heirs.

All these matters are confirmed, from time to time, in an appropriate *Suras* of the Koran. The revelation of *Al Baqarah* virtually summarises these laws, and may be described as the Koran itself in miniature. Apart from matters of a social nature, this *Sura* refers to other questions of importance to Muslims. It refers to

the message being delivered to mankind through Muhammad, the last of the Prophets; it expressly contradicts the statement that no one may enter paradise, unless he be a Jew or a Christian, and opens the gates to all who do good, while surrendering to the will of Allah; it says that the East and the West both belong to Allah, and whichever way you turn you meet His countenance; that Allah has no need to take a son to Himself, for everything is subservient to him; and enjoins Muslims to vie with one another in good works; the necessity of the annual fast is emphasised, as also the Pilgrimage of Mecca; finally, it exhorts Muslims to fight in the way of Allah.

[5]

Great and far reaching as are the Prophet's efforts in social legislation, not all his time is devoted in this direction. Primarily, he is the head of Islam, and only secondly is he also the head of a temporal state. In congregational prayers he is still the grand old man preaching the unity of Allah and of His creation. The new *Suras* of the Koran are no less eloquent upon the attributes of the Omnipotent than the Meccan revelations. While they were fugitives and outlaws, the Prophet and his little band

met wherever and however possible, with a minimum of publicity and ostentation. Prayers had perforce to be very short, for times and occasions were doubtful. But in Medina, there is peace and leisure to say the five obligatory prayers, and to hold regular weekly congregations. The time has now come to settle the formulas and to prescribe the procedure.

The benefactions of peace have made, however, no difference in the Prophet's views on prayer. Prayer to him is still the outpouring of a grateful heart, the self-immolation before God, the communion between the Creator and his creatures. No change, therefore, is introduced in the venue of prayer. It may be said anywhere under the blue sky or in the secrecy of the bed chamber. No ritual is necessary, no glittering cloth of gold, no flowers, no incense, no water of rose or lavender. No priest is necessary, no rabbi, no pandit, no holy father. Every man may say his prayers alone or in congregation at his option. Congregational prayers may be led by any one, who is more conversant with the Koran than others present, or if he is invited by the congregation to lead the prayers. But the time has come to fix its formulæ in definite order, and to settle the mode of sum-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

moning the Faithful. There are no difficulties about the former matters, but as to the last mentioned problem, namely that of calling the Faithful to prayer, there are several suggestions. Some are of opinion that the trumpet of the Jews would be suitable, others recommend bells as rung by the Christians. The problem is solved by Umar relating a dream he has recently had, when he saw a man standing on a lofty minaret, and, in a voice with music in it, declaring to the greatness of Allah; that prayer is better than sleep; that there is no God who deserves to be worshipped than Allah; that Muhammad is His messenger; inviting the Faithful to come to prayer and to come to success; and closing, as he had begun, with *Allah-hu Akbar*.

The dream solves the problem. There is no musical instrument with the range and ambit of the human voice. From this time onwards, the muezzins, five times a day, call the Faithful to prayer, in the grand words of Umar's vision.

[6]

If any one should be suspicious of the Prophet's growing power and authority, it is the simple people of Yathreb, who have invited

him to come and be their king. He has swept away many time-honoured conceptions and usages; he has introduced reforms which would have scandalised their fore-fathers. On the other hand, if there is any group of Medinite people, who should be pleased with the work of the Prophet, it ought to be the Jews, for Muhammad has recognised the virtues of their Prophets; he has withheld the claims of Jesus to the promised Messiahship, thereby leaving room for a Jew to appear in due season; he has granted them the fullest freedom of conscience and worship; he has even gone to the length of fixing Jerusalem as the centre to which Muslims should turn in prayer. But no concession, no toleration, no latitude seems enough to assure him of loyalty from the Jews. The half-hearted welcome, which they extended to him on his entry into Medina, has now turned to bitterness and hate. Generosity is being repaid by treason. They make no secret of their disappointment that they cannot use Muhammad as an instrument for the conversion of Arabia to Judaism. Accordingly, therefore, they are ranged on side of the enemies of Islam; they break the terms of their pact with the Prophet; when asked whether they prefer Islam

or idolatry, they pronounce in favour of the latter; their poets vilify the Prophet and the members of his family in ribald verse; and the Koran becomes a gibe of the market place. The leaders of the Jews negotiate with hostile tribes and even with the Quraish of Mecca. Sedition and treason stalk defiantly through Medina.

It is a situation unique in Muhammad's life. He has been a preacher and a prophet, he has been content to rely upon Allah and to ignore the vulgar gibes of his detractors. But as the custodian of the safety of a state, can he overlook treachery, or shut his eyes to the growth of sinister intrigues?

An old saying declares that, "If you would succeed, you must not be too good." Within their own limits, sentiments of piety, gratitude and generosity are admirable; there may be occasions, however, when renunciation of these feelings may be an advantage, or even a necessity. Critics have not been wanting of the Prophet's efforts to win the support of the Jews. His trust in their good sense and their loyalty has been ascribed to his lack of knowledge of human nature and inexperience in the game of politics.

REFORMER

Muhammad is neither deaf nor blind to the menace around him. He may be a man in whom sentiment and affection are uppermost, but he realises that if he would save the state, whose destinies have been placed in his hands, his head must have command and not his heart. He is no believer in magic or in miracles. He is now a worker with his hands, a builder of mosques of wood and brick, a lawgiver, an administrator, a consistent and wise master-craftsman. But to his purely physical and mineral forces, he combines natural and intellectual power, foresight, generalisation and command. In him the elements have taken flesh. The desert and blue heavens seem to presuppose him. He once preached of the alchemy of alms, charity and good deeds,—not that he has forgotten these recipes now,—but everything in its right occasion. The present situation calls for other qualities. He sets about learning the arithmetic of war, of gold and money, of armour, steeds, men and supplies. He learns the art of war and the chess of battle. He assumes for his purpose that his forces would always be inferior in numbers and in equipment. His whole talent is strained to find victory in man-œuvre and evolution, in stratagem and in tactics,

the angle of attack and the possible points of engagement. His efforts at legislation and reform have proved the directness and thoroughness of his work, the prudence, the common sense and the energy of a man of action. To nature must be ascribed the greatest share in every success, and so too in his case. The Arabs had need of such a man, and such a man has been forthcoming. Stone and iron with a heart of gold. The new turn of events reveals him in possession of a directness of action never before combined with so much tenderness. He shows strength where strength is needed, insight where required; he plunges into the situation with a determination that is inspiring, and a faith that is infectious.

Arab warfare consists of sudden frays,—taking the enemy by surprise or an attack under cover of night. To avoid, therefore, being taken unawares, Muhammad has spies to watch all the caravan routes that pass through the hills, as also the routes by the sea-shore. He is conscious of the rumblings below the surface; he is not deceived by the placid stillness of the waters. He is awake to the activities of his enemies. No formal declaration of war is necessary. He is still an outlaw of the Quraish;—there is a price

upon his head. Often attack is the best defensive. His spies keep him in close touch with the movements of the Quraish, their plans and alliances. He is in the field before his enemies. He has scattered skirmishing parties, who have instructions to worry the enemy, but not to risk a pitched battle.

Abdullah-ibn Jahsh, at the head of nine men, is posted near Nakla, a valley dividing Mecca and Ta'if, surprises a caravan of the Quraish, and returns to Medina laden with spoil and captives. This easy advantage raises Muslim hopes and augurs well of the future.

Not long after this engagement, it is reported that a Quraish caravan of a thousand camels is on its way from Syria to Mecca, laden with ammunition of war and rich merchandise. Its escort is headed by no less a general than Abu Sufyan himself. As the caravan proceeds on its way to Mecca, there is manœuvre and counter-manœuvre. The Prophet despatches picked spies to watch the caravan in the hills. Abu Sufyan is awake to the movements of his enemy, and decides to halt. He despatches urgent couriers to Mecca for help. Abu Jahl, who is leader of the city forces in Abu Sufyan's absence, is directed to hasten to his assistance.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

It is the pride of Mecca's army that sets out to protect the great caravan. One hundred horsemen and nine hundred foot soldiers, fully equipped in armour and munitions of war, with a flutter of banners and glittering scimitars, march towards the north. The Prophet hears of the army that is on its way to meet him. No more is skirmishing possible. The die has been cast. If Medina is to be saved a pitched battle is inevitable. In the host under Abu Jahl, he sees the determination of the Quraish to settle, once and for all, accounts with him.

He too takes stock. Can Medina put forth an army? The Jews and Christians offer no assistance: some even reckon the hours when Abu Jahl's horsemen will crash through the streets of Medina. Sedition, like a worm, has eaten the vitals of Arab loyalty. The sitters-on-the-fence are more numerous than ever. Abdullah-ibn Ubbay, leader of an important section of opinion, is frankly hostile. With all his authority, the Prophet can raise only three hundred and thirteen men to meet the Meccan invasion. His cavalry consists of two horsemen and seventy camel. The whole force is recruited entirely from the Muhajerin and Ansar. But, what is lacking, in numbers and equipment, is

made up in faith and determination. This little band of warriors is determined either to conquer or perish. It is setting an important tradition in Islam that, when the call of battle comes, a Muslim must fight, whatever the odds.

There is little time to be lost; Muhammad hands over the reins of his authority to a deputy and sets out at the head of his three hundred and thirteen men for a port on the shores of the sea. Here news is brought to the Prophet that Abu Sufyan's caravan is approaching Badr and the Meccans are advancing to cover it. He departs at once, and marches his men with such diligence that he arrives at Badr soon after the enemy and encamps across their passage.

It is Friday, the 17th of Ramadan. The Quraish already find that they have been forestalled, for Muhammad has entrenched himself near the wells in order to command the supply of drinking water. Abu Jahl is annoyed that he has lost this position of vantage, but when his scouts bring him details of the army that confronts him, he smiles. Muhammad may be a brave and daring man, but what can bravery and daring do against a trained army, three times superior in number and incomparably

superior in equipment? The chieftains of the Quraish nudge one another, it will be a slaughter, a massacre.

Muhammad, on the other hand, faces the rival host with equanimity. Seldom have such momentous issues hung on such slender threads. With the Faithful Abu Bakr by his side, he marches up and down the ranks, giving the final orders of battle. There is a change in his face to-day. Gone is the dreamy look in his eyes. Gone the quiet sullenness of his mouth. He seems to be enthused with a new vigour. Despite his fifty-six years, he looks younger than ever, and stronger. He looks to-day a born leader of men. His dark piercing eyes are flashing right and left to see that every man is in his place. In his face is a grim determination to emerge victorious or to die in martyrdom.

Nature seems to sense the gravity of the occasion. Large banks of clouds roll across the sky. The sun has not shown his face; and a chill north wind sweeps across the valley.

The Quraish have moved forward to the attack with Utba, Sheiba and Walid, thirsting to vindicate the honour of their gods. Ali, Hamza and Ubeida have gone out to meet them.

Muhammad prays to Allah: "Allah, here are the idolaters. Intoxicated with pomp and arrogance, they come to accuse Your Prophet of being a liar and an impostor. If Lord, You allow this army to perish, You will not be worshipped on earth. Lord send us help, and fulfill Your promise." It is the cry of a man, who having done his best, leaves the future to his God.

The armies look with admiration upon the brilliance and skill of the fight among the six chieftains. Hamza has been appropriately called 'the Lion'. Ali is giving proofs of daring and genius. Walid is the hero of many battles, but he is fighting to-day as he has never fought before. He seems to be inspired, but is the first to go down—perhaps age is responsible. As he lies in mortal agony, he hopes that his boy Khalid will some day avenge his death. Next to fall is Sheiba. Ubeida, who is in hot combat with Utba, has already lost a foot in the struggle; but is stoutly defending himself from the onslaughts of the fierce Utba. Hamza and Ali, having laid their adversaries low, are free to hurry to Ubeida's aid. Utba now attacked by three redoubtable Muslims is put upon the defensive. He meets his assailants dauntless as ever, giving blow for blow, slash for slash. But the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

verdict is never in doubt. Ali and Hamza wear him out, and eventually, he too takes his place in the sand with Walid and Sheiba. A great cry goes up from the Muslim ranks, "*Allab-hu Akbar.*" As inspired men, the Muslims plunge into the midst of Meccan host. In spite of the wishes of his men, Muhammad himself seeks the thick of battle. His face is radiant. He is fighting and encouraging his men at the same time. "Allah is with us," says he, "His angels are with us. Doubt not Muslims! Victory to-day is ours!" Three hundred are fighting a thousand. But Muhammad seems to have lit in their hearts a flaming enthusiasm. Every man knows the odds. He feels it is a divine recognition of his strength. He is convinced that it is either victory here or Paradise beyond. He is convinced that Islam is invincible.

The Meccans never laid score upon the Muslim resistance. The odds were too heavily in their favour; they were also better armed and equally inspired in their cause. They were officered by the most conspicuous of the Quraish, men to whom defeat was hearsay. But, as not infrequently happens, superiority and strength may be its own undoing. And so, here to-day, at Badr, a combination of circumstances—the

fall of three Meccan chieftains, the incredible fury of the Muslim onslaught, and a biting wind carrying sand and stone into their faces—have demoralised the Quraish. Abu Jahl, their commander-in-chief has fallen to Ali's sabre; and many others of Meccan captains sleep in the dust. Eventually the Meccans seem inclined to yield. Their ranks waver. The Prophet sees their indecision; he picks up a handful of sand and throws it towards them: "May your eyes be covered with darkness," says he, "and turning sharply to his companions, "courage companions, charge the enemy. Victory is yours." With these words, the spirit of the Muslims is again roused. They make a final effort. Every man puts out his last ounce of energy. In a terrific onslaught they fall upon the Quraish. The enemy takes to its heels in precipitous flight. Victory is complete.

The Quraish have left seventy dead on the field of Badr. They have lost an equal number in prisoners. Abu Jahl, Walid, Utba and other illustrious captains of the war are among the dead. Abbas and Ukba are in custody; rich booty has fallen into Muslim hands. Forty Muslims have attained martyrdom. The battle has established the faith of Muslims in the in-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

vincibility of their mission. Ali, who is now about twenty-two years of age, has given proofs of such valour, that some see in him an incarnation of Mars. He has killed no less than seven warriors with his own hands. The Prophet decides to reward him with the gift of his dearest child, the gentle Fatima. Among the seventy prisoners taken by the Muslims are Al-Nadir and Ukba; also Abbas, the Prophet's uncle and Abul'As, the husband of Zainab, eldest daughter of the Prophet. Abbas is released, for though he has been a stout Quraish, he has at the same time been considerate and tolerant to the Prophet. Muhammad cannot forget Abbas' warning to men of Yathreb, when they came to invite him to their city, that they should only take him if they sincerely believed in his mission and not for the purpose of betraying him to his enemies. Abul'As is also given his freedom, subject to the return of Zainab to her father. Al Nadir and Ukba, who have spared no pains in the vilification of the Prophet, and from whom no repentance may be expected, pay the extreme penalty of war. But Muhammad's heart is full of mildness, for, when he hears the touching lament of Al Nadir's daughter, his eyes fill with tears. He is genuinely grieved that he cannot

give her back her father's life. This trait in his character is also evident when, contrary to all usages and traditions of his race, he directs that the prisoners of war should be treated with kindness and respected for their misfortunes.

The victory of Badr is an important landmark in the rise of Islam. The Quraish, who for nearly seventeen years have discredited and persecuted the new cult, have suffered a staggering defeat. The flower of their military talent is buried beside the wells of Badr. Mecca sees in the defeat an ill-augury for the future: Islam has found a foothold; no longer is it a movement to be trifled with, nor may its influence be discounted. It has become a living menace. In Muslim eyes, the victory is equally important. It gives them a proud status in Medina, a place in which they felt they lived by sufferance. It establishes the Prophet's position more firmly than ever; it upsets the designs of his detractors, and worries the outlook of his foes.

But victory has made no difference in Muhammad, the man. In the thick of battle he seemed a man of iron and steel. In victory however, he is the same good-hearted Prophet as of old. He has surprised his followers by the mildness and tenderness with which he has treat-

ed the prisoners of war. He is not giving himself or his men any credit for the success. He has ascribed all the credit to God: "He promised us help;" says he, "He has kept his promise. There were a thousand angels fighting on our side." And when his men quarrel over the spoils of war, a *sura* of the Koran tells them that they should divide it equally among them (after deducting a fifth for charity through the public treasury), for "victory only comes by the help of Allah, and it was not the Muslims who slew the unbelievers but Allah Himself."

[7]

Before continuing in the narrative of the Prophet's career as the ruler of the Medinite Commonwealth, and the story of his struggle with the Quraish, we must glance back a little over the past and take a brief retrospect of a few important events in his private life. We have seen how much the loss of Khadija meant to him. We have referred to the alliance with Ayesha, Abu Bakr's daughter, and Sauda, widow of a Muslim refugee to Abyssinia. It will be remembered that Ayesha, at the time of her marriage, was too young to be introduced to the calls of matrimony, and continued to stay with her father until nature should, in due time,

open to her, the vistas of life. Muhammad at the time of these marriages was passing through one of the most critical periods of his life. Much has happened in the short space of a few years. From the hiding places in the hills of the Shib, Muhammad is now established in supreme power at Medina. Ayesha, in the intervening period has gained in learning and in understanding. She now knows what marriage signifies, its purpose and its consequences. She knows and understands equally the significance of a union with an important personage, who is, not merely a very dear friend of her father but also, the chief of Medina and the head of Al Islam. Nature has endowed her with more than a normal share of good looks, and combined with it a handsome quota of intelligence. With these qualifications, at the age of fifteen, she takes her place in the Prophet's household.

Upon assumption of the duties of a wife, Ayesha found Sauda a helpful colleague. The former, though a trifle older, is still young and attractive.

Muhammad, according to a sense of fairness, has set apart similar accommodations for his wives, and visits them in turn. Ayesha soon asserts her importance in his household; she is

self-willed, a trifle too impressed with the Prophet's position of authority.

Said Ayesha one day looking into the mirror: "Am I not more pleasing than that old woman Khadija you used to love?"

A frown knit on the Prophet's brow: "No woman will ever take Khadija's place in my heart. She gave me sympathy when I was friendless; she believed in me when the whole world doubted."

Ayesha has never forgotten the rebuke.

When the Prophet entered Medina in triumph, one of the women who watched his arrival was Hafsa, the beautiful. She stood by the side of her father Umar. As the Prophet passed, he entrusted to her keeping a precious havel containing the Koran. Hafsa, who has inherited her father's looks and fiery temper, married a young Muslim of great promise. The latter unfortunately lost his life on the field of Badr, leaving Hafsa a widow, while still in the bloom of a magnificent spring. Umar offered her to Abu Bakr, and then to Uthman, but both are men who prefer to sail on placid waters, while Hafsa's attractions are like the beauties of a swollen sea. When Abu Bakr and Uthman declined the offer with thanks, the Pro-

phet helped to solve the problem and Hafsa collaborates in the matrimonial state with Sauda and Ayesha.

Another event of note in the Prophet's household has been the marriage of Zaid with Zainab, daughter of Umaina, who in turn was the daughter of Abdul Muttalib. Zaid was, as we have already observed, at one time a slave of the Prophet whose liberty was given to him in return for loyalty and zeal in the service of his master. Zaid's fidelity was further rewarded by the Prophet accepting him as an adopted son. The lady Zainab before her marriage was known to be attached to her cousin Muhammad, and begged her mother to marry her to him. Zainab's brother also preferred the latter proposal to that of his sister marrying a freed man. The Prophet, however, was anxious to indicate by practical example that any Muslim is entitled to marry any Muslim woman, no matter how great the disparity in positions by reason of family and worldly affluence. Under his authority, therefore, Zaid espoused a lady from the proud Quraish, who was herself the grand-daughter of the great Abdul Muttalib.

After Badr, Ali marries Fatima, who is about Ayesha's age and her father's favourite

child. Since Khadija's death, no woman has meant to the Prophet what little Fatima has done. She has been the jewel he has treasured in his heart; in her he has seen much of himself and the fine qualities of her mother. Fatima has her mother's belief in his infallibility, she has his gentleness of heart. She is faithful and regular in prayer, and has none of the vices or secret artifices of girls of her age. In parting with her, he gives Ali what is most dear to him. Ali too deserves this recognition, for he has furnished evidence of incorruptible sincerity and a profound sense of duty. In the battle of Badr, he gave proofs of daring and genius that won him praise from friend and foe alike. While no man in the world seems quite good enough for dear Fatima, if there be such a man, it is Ali.

Since the death of Qasim, no son has sprung of Muhammad's seed. In Zaid and Ali the Prophet found nuggets of the purest gold. But no adopted son, however excellent, can quite take the place of a son of one's own body. This is one of the idiosyncrasies of nature. Every man at sometime or other longs for a son of his own flesh, a son in his own image. In this the rich man and the poor man, the great and the

humble, share common sentiment. And Muhammad, the Apostle of Al Islam, the ruler of Medina, the victor of Badr, is no more than a mere man. Muhammad has daughters, loving, tender and pure, daughters such as any father would be proud of; but Muhammad's heart aches for a son.

The rejoicing over Badr was shortlived. A few days after the battle, Ruqayya, the Prophet's daughter, died. Ruqayya, was one of the immigrants to Abyssinia with her husband Uthman, who on the turn of the Prophet's fortune returned to Arabia with his wife, setting up home in Medina. As the Prophet is anxious that the link with Uthman should continue, the latter espouses Ruqayya's younger sister. The nuptials are celebrated quietly for Ruqayya's loss still bears heavily upon Uthman and the Prophet.

[8]

It is the third year of the *Hijra*. Nearly twelve months have elapsed since a small band of Muslims laid low the pride of the Quraish by the wells of Badr. Most of the prisoners of war have, by this time, secured their freedom, and returned to their homes. Those, whose means could afford it, have been released on the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

payment of the stipulated ransom of four thousand dirhams. Some, who were too poor to pay, have been allowed to go free; some who could read and write, have worked their way out by teaching ten children each the Arabic script and grammar. No one among the prisoners has been treated harshly, for, in this matter, the Prophet's instructions have been explicit.

On their return home to Mecca, the captives bore testimony to the humanity of Muhammad and of the Muslims. Some gave expression to particular gratitude: "Blessings be on men of Medina; they made us ride, when they walked on foot; they gave us white bread, when there was little of it, contenting themselves with dates." One of them related how he was brought before the Prophet and charged with being a man of learning, who had denounced Islam in violent terms. His accusers sought permission of the Prophet to knock out two of his teeth, so that whenever he would open his mouth, everybody would know why he had been punished by the Muslims. "Let him go," the Prophet said, sternly, "if I disfigure him, God will disfigure me."

But the opinion of the home-coming

Meccans has not been sufficient to modify the feelings of hatred still cherished by the Quraish. Their defeat at Badr at the hands of an ill-armed rabble has become the scandal of the tribes. It has lowered them in the general esteem. Such ignominy was never conceived of as possible.

As time goes forward, the desire for revenge burns fiercer and fiercer. It becomes a passion, a lust. Abu Sufyan's wife Hinda cries day and night for retribution from the slayers of her father Ukba. So insistent are her demands that Abu Sufyan, upon his own, marches out towards Medina with two hundred men. When, however, they catch sight of the Prophet's forces, their courage fails them, and they return to Mecca in precipitous retreat, leaving behind their stock of meal. This campaign comes to be known as the 'campaign of the meal bags,' and makes the Quraish even more contemptible in the eyes of their fellow tribes.

In victory or defeat, Muhammad is the same earnest worker for the common weal, the gentle Prophet, but the firm incorruptible administrator. Certain Jews, who have been responsible for vulgar versification upon Islam, and treacherous intrigues are executed. Others

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

are banished. Among the latter is Ka'b, a famous poet. No sooner is he outside the boundaries of Medina than he heads straight for Mecca, where he becomes, in a short while, a great figure. His exile adds fuel to his hate of Muhammad and Islam. He satirizes Muslims, composes elegies upon the fallen Quraish at Badr, and writes prophetic verse about the triumph of Meccan armies and the destruction of Medina. His poems receive great public approbation, and rouse feverish enthusiasm. A renewal of hostilities cannot long be now delayed.

Ka'b's emotions, however, prove the better of his discretion. He ventures into Medina in the hope of seducing some wavering chieftains. He is surprised and taken in custody. No elaborate trial is necessary for his conviction. He has violated the decree of outlawry, he has inflamed passions, he has done his best to precipitate a conflict between the Quraish and Medina. There can be only one sentence for such a man. A severed head terminates his poetic career.

But the stage has already been set; Ka'b's death only expedites the retrial of strength. Abu Sufyan, Commander of the Quraish, is

already famous among Arabs as a man of great military talent, resourceful and relentless. His efforts to rouse the Quraish, as also certain neighbouring tribes have proved successful. Thus, at the head of a well-equipped army of three thousand men, he sets out to avenge the disaster of Badr. By his side are the bravest of the young captains of Mecca,—Akrama son of Abu Jahl, and Khalid son of Walid. In his army, there are no less than seven hundred men in coats of mail. Abu Sufyan has also a detachment of cavalry numbering two hundred. The army is accompanied by a large body of women to rouse the spirit of the warriors and to subtly inspire the men to victory.

It is at Uhud that the armies meet for battle. The Quraish host has all but completed the march to Medina. Uhud is only an hour's walk from the city walls. Here Abu Sufyan's army rests to refresh itself, and to lay waste the orchards and cultivations of the people of Medina. The Prophet has taken counsel. In his opinion the Muslim forces are inadequate to meet the enemy. Intuitively, he forebodes evil. He has had dreams of the slaughter of cows, the breaking of his sword and an effort to put on a shirt of mail. These meanderings of the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

subconscious are interpreted to indicate that discretion would be better served by remaining within the walls of Medina. The older companions of the Prophet share this view of the situation. But youth is eager for battle. What! Watch the Quraish lay waste the orchards and fields, and crops ready for harvest? How could Medina hereafter face its neighbours? What self-respect could they command? Youth is emphatic. It carries its view-point. At sunset, therefore, the Prophet marches out of Medina at the head of a thousand men, of whom only a hundred are equipped with coats of mail. The Muslim army is possessed of no cavalry.

The night is spent in preparing the details of battle. With the Prophet are his faithful companions, Ali, Hamza and Abu Bakr. Abdullah-ibn Ubbay also links forces with the Prophet, but the sight of the enemy dissolves this alliance, Abdullah deserting together with the rest of his three hundred men.

Dawn finds seven hundred Muslims confronted by a host over four times in number. A few light clouds float aimlessly across the sky. The sunrise splashes the scene in scarlet. The banners of the Quraish flutter impudently in the

breeze. There is a sound of chanting and singing in the Meccan camp. The shrill voices of women may be heard: "Courage! You sons of Abd-ud Dar, Courage! You defenders of women! Strike home with the edges of your swords!" In a chorus that sounds like thunder, three thousand throats respond. Again say the women: "We are daughters of the morn. Face the enemy boldly, and with scented hair and pearl-ornamented necks, we will press you upon our breasts. Fly, and we shall shun you, shun you with disgust." Again a mighty chorus echoes across the heavens.

The Muslims too seem no less inspired. The desertion of Abdullah-ibn Ubbay has added fresh edge to their determination. An old man goes up to the Prophet and pleads for permission to join the ranks: "I am, O Apostle, on the verge of the grave. Let me have the glory of striking a blow for Allah." A boy is found standing on tiptoe to make up for his height. Everywhere the same enthusiasm is evident. At Badr the Muslims faced odds of three to one. What if the odds to-day have been lengthened to four to one? Even the young feel as grizzled veterans, fair of face and sturdy of limb, pale olive skins tanned with the heat of Arabian sun,

and with the old spirit coming back into their hearts, several turn to bay upon the glittering legions of Mecca. They are confident, a trifle too confident.

The Prophet is not in the rear as at Badr. From the outset, he is at the head of his forces; galloping here and there, giving his captains the last orders of battle. A red fillet round his head makes him conspicuous. Everywhere he is to be found, encouraging his men, telling them of the odds they face, and the need for their utmost valour and devotion to duty. This dreamer Prophet has marshalled his forces to the best advantage. He has taken the high ground sloping towards the sea with his rear to Mount Uhud. The jagged cliffs of Mount Uhud rise from the plain in a huge wall of granite. Not a bird or a beast disturbs its solitary isolation. No tree or shrub relieves its barrenness. The sullen scowl of the rocks may be seen for long distances across the countryside. Mount Uhud is impregnable to attack except for one huge crevice. Here Muhammad posts fifty archers with orders not to leave their position, whatever the fate of the battle. Their duty is to guard the Muslim flank and rear in all eventualities. His directions in this matter are unambiguous: "Whatever hap-

pens, stick to your position. Do not leave it, if we are victorious; do not leave it, if we are defeated—not even to bring succour to us. Watch the enemy. Whenever they move to take us in the back, load them with arrows.”

Abu Sufyan advances as the centre of a wide crescent. Immediately behind him come the idols of Mecca, and, behind them, the magnificent army of the Quraish and their allies. The flanks are in the charge of Akrama and Khalid, each being entrusted with a detachment of a hundred cavalry. The women of the Quraish are in the rear, still vociferously urging their men to battle, promising soft favours in exchange for valour. The Muslim centre is in charge of Hamza, supported by Ali.

The first attack of the Quraish proves listless, it makes little impression on the Muslim ranks, which seem to hold together like the grim rocks of Mount Uhud itself. The Quraish retire, as if rebounding off a wall. Hamza's blade gleams in the air, he dashes into the midst of the Unbelievers, followed by Ali and the Muslim infantry. The din of battle is terrific. Heads roll in the dust, like so many displaced pebbles. The mounds of sand turn scarlet with the carnage.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Muslims are fighting as they have never fought before. Even at Badr they did not show such prodigious valour. Every man is a hero to-day. It would require a volume in itself to chronicle the deeds of heroism that Mount Uhud looks down upon. The Quraish are also fighting with heroism born of desperation. Seven members of the family of Abd-ud Dar, each in turn, perform the hereditary office of the standard bearer of Mecca, and go down before the Muslim onslaught.

Talha, brandishing his sabre, challenges Ali to combat crying: "You say that we go to Hell and you go to Heaven; come I will send you to Heaven."

"First I will despatch you to Hell," retorts Ali, and falls upon his foe. And so they fight in grim rage. Eventually, Talha is struck to the ground.

Says Ali, "Now Talha, are you ready?"

"Mercy," begs Talha.

"So be it," says Ali, "Hell fires are not for brave men like you," and moves forward to where the battle is thickest.

The Meccans waver, and begin to lose ground; there is confusion as Abu Sufyan and his army retreat, pressed back by the irresistible

REFORMER

Muslims. Shouts of "*Allah-bu Akbar*" go up from all sides. Victory is once again with the followers of the Prophet. Badr has been repeated. Joy takes possession of Muslim hearts; all ranks burst forward towards the enemy to make victory doubly sure. In the pursuit of the Quraish, the archers, left behind to guard the Muslim rear, also give chase, lest they be too late for the spoils of battle.

Khalid has not been in the thick of the fight. His horsemen have been standing by for emergency. With keen eyes, he has watched the fortunes of the day. He has not dared to enter the conflict, much as he would have liked to, for the intrusion of cavalry would have made confusion worse confounded. In dismay, he has seen the great host of Mecca fall back before the fury of the Muslims. When suddenly, he sees the Muslim archers desert their position to join the general *melee*.

The fate of battles is oft-times determined on slender manoeuvres. Khalid has no sooner seen the bare spot in the Medinite flank than, in a flash, he has, with his one hundred horsemen, taken possession of the crevice. He is now through and upon the Muslim rear. The tide of fortune has turned. From the offensive, the fol-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

lowers of the Prophet have to return to the defensive, from pursuers they become the beleaguered.

Disaster now overtakes the Prophet's army. Hamza 'the lion' is slain, after accounting for several Meccans. Hamza was in conflict with another Quraish, when Washi the negro plunged a javelin in his back. And as the day wears on, numbers begin to count. Ali, as usual, is giving an excellent account of himself. The valour of the Prophet is an inspiration to those around him. Wherever the enemy seems strongest, he is there, proclaiming loudly "Rally O Believers. Allah is with us. Victory shall be ours." His voice is the clarion call, uniting the Faithful, and inspiring them to fresh effort. It also attracts the attention of the enemy. His shout and his bright red fillet make him prominent wherever he goes. He is becoming the target of the enemy. Javelins hurtle through the air. Arrows narrowly miss their mark; sabres flash, but do no harm. The Prophet is wearing a charmed life.

But for how long? His standard bearer Mus'ab-ibn Umair is struck down. As Musa'ib resembles the Prophet, the news goes round that Muhammad is dead. Meanwhile the Prophet is

wounded and fallen face down into a trench. The rumour of his death runs quickly through the ranks of friend and foe. It encourages the enemy; it proves destructive to Muslim morale.

The latter, who were, a short while ago, in pursuit of the Quraish, are themselves now in precipitous retreat. Flight to Medina seems the only course left. But suddenly the armour and red fillet of the Prophet's turban is recognised. He is still breathing and living. Umar, Abu Bakr, Ali and ten or twelve others gather round him. Abu Bakr bends down and lifts his head into his lap and wipes the blood from his wounds. The Faithful form a human wall round his person. Umar is striking out in a terrific manner. His eyes are bloodshot, the perspiration is warm upon his brow. Nature has endowed him with gigantic stature and incredible strength. Every inch of his stature and every ounce of his strength he is putting into the titanic conflict. Ali seems tireless; his brother Jafar is also giving evidence of stupendous valour. Eventually, step by step, they carve for themselves a way to a rocky promontory; and here, with their precious burden, defy the might of the legions of Mecca.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Abu Sufyan shouts from a distance: "Is Muhammad there among you?" There is no reply. "Is Abu Bakr there among you?" There is no reply. Then shouts Abu Sufyan, "Glory to Hobal, for they are all dead." This is too much for the mighty Umar who retorts, "The Apostle of Allah lives; Abu Bakr lives; they are both alive to bring woe to you yet."

And as evening falls upon the scene, it finds the verdict still in the balance. The Muslim phalanx is impregnable in its position of vantage. The Quraish are masters of the field, but greatly thinned in numbers and greatly disappointed, for Muhammad is alive and so too his immediate companions. The odds of four to one have not proved sufficient to wipe out the Muslim opposition; the tactical victory of Khalid has borne but poor result. The Quraish have the corpses of Hamza and a hundred Muslims to show the populace of Mecca, but not a single prisoner of war, not a tittle of booty. With the corpses they do as they please. The wild Hinda provides herself from Hamza's body with food and raiment. She wears his entrails as a necklace, and eats his liver. Her companions satisfy a feminine delight by cutting off heads and laughing into their faces.

They take a collection of noses and ears back to Mecca as momentos of Uhud. In addition to these incidents of revenge, the Quraish do not press their advantage. They do not walk into the streets of Medina, nor seize the seats of power. They do not proclaim the victory of the gods of the Ka'ba over the God of Islam. The great host that had set out, with such rosy hopes, returns homeward, a wiser and chastened rabble. On the way home to Mecca, Abu Sufyan realises the full sense of disappointment at the intangible results of his victory. He takes counsel with his captains, who decide to return and exterminate the Muslims, weakened by the disaster at Uhud. The Prophet too has suspicions that they may return, and prefers to meet them in the open than at Medina. As Abu Sufyan marches back, he meets a Bedouin, friendly to the Prophet, who reports that the latter is seeking vengeance and marching towards Mecca with an overwhelming force. Abu Sufyan, with his worn-out forces, decides to return to Mecca forthwith.

The death of Hamza has touched the Prophet profoundly. When the Quraish left the field, he had Hamza's corpse searched out. It was found terribly mutilated. Along with the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

other dead, it was buried with all the solemnities of a martyrdom. The Prophet prohibits the customary usages of mourning, such as shaving of the hair, the rending of garments and striking the breast. He permits tears, for tears are human. Of Hamza he says: "Hamza's name is written in the scrolls of the Seventh Heaven with the glorious title of '*Hamza the Lion of God and the Lion of Islam*'." Having robed himself in a black mantle, the Prophet prays for the dead in seven invocations. All the dead—friend and foe—were buried where they fell; and little heaps of coloured granite, red sandstone and bits of porphyry denote for future generations the spot, where lie the valiant slain.

The Prophet has no fault to find with Allah for the defeat at Uhud. On the contrary, victory was already with the Muslims, when the archers threw it away to Khalid and his men. In a verse of the Koran it is revealed that at Uhud, "God had fulfilled His promises, when you pursued the defeated enemy; but you lent an ear to the counsel of disobedience and were attracted by the prospect of booty and violated the orders of the Prophet." But, in spite of the conduct of those who deserted their

position in the lust of spoil, there is no mention of punishment. Says the Koran, "Allah has forgiven you, for Allah is the Lord of kindness." For those who fell in the fight "there is great reward." The Koran also makes it clear that, in the event of the Prophet having been slain in battle for he is no more than a mere messenger, Islam would not die. Truth is truth and, though its advocate may be killed, Believers would not forsake the truth.

The majesty, sublimity and supreme confidence of the verses of the Koran of these dark days are profound. "It is not the purpose of Allah to have you in your present state. If you will keep away from evil and believe in the message of Allah, yours is a vast reward." "O you who believe! Endure; outdo all others in endurance; be ready, and observe your duty to Allah, in order that you may succeed."

CHAPTER V

WARRIOR

In Medina itself, the disaster of Uhud has made little difference in the credit of the Prophet. Among Muslims he commands the same veneration and the same blind obedience. He is still their king and pontiff. In matters of state, as of religion, his word has the authority of law. There are no two opinions that, so far as he was concerned, he outgeneralled the Quraish, and Uhud would have been a victory, if it had not been thrown away by an act of unpardonable disobedience. Nor is there any justification for complaint against Allah that He has not kept his promises by the Faithful.

But outside Medina, the result of the battle is clearly visible in the changed attitude of the neighbouring tribes. The favourable impression created by the victory at Badr has been removed. No longer does the authority of Medina command much respect. Jew, Christian and Arab alike believe that the extermination of the Muslims, at the hands of the Quraish, is only a

matter of time. It is also no secret that the best of the Muslim army is buried at Uhud, and it will be some time yet before Medina can replace its loss.

News filters in that several neighbours are planning forays into the territories of Medina. The Prophet is alive to the perils of the situation, a situation demanding constant vigilance. But as circumstances exist, the Prophet is powerless to prevent outrage upon his followers, or to punish perfidy adequately.

Thus is Medina stirred by the tale which Amr Ummaya brings of his escape from the hands of the Banu Amir and Banu Sulaim. Not many days earlier Abu Bara, chief of these tribes, came to the Prophet to embrace Islam and to invite Muslim missionaries among his people. The Prophet, not doubting his bonafides, sent seventy teachers, of whom Amr Ummaya was one. When the party arrived at Bir-i-Mauna, and were about to cross a stream, they found themselves surrounded by a large body of soldiers. Abu Bara gave orders for them to be slain. Amr's companions were, accordingly, all murdered, and only he escaped by feigning to be dead. A like fate has befallen the six preachers sent to Alkada; four were slaughtered by their

hosts, and the remaining two sold to the Quraish. Of these Khubaib was brought by the kinsmen of Harith, whom Khubaib slew in the battle of Badr. They were delighted to possess the right victim to offer to the spirit of their dead kinsman. The execution was a festal occasion. All the members of the family were specially invited; and when all had assembled, the victim was led to the place of sacrifice. Here he was allowed to say his prayers; then one of the daughters of Harith drew upto him and with a glittering blade severed his head.

The other, Zaid, was purchased by another family for the same purpose. But Zaid's execution was a more important affair, considering the celebrities who assembled to witness it. Among others present was Abu Sufyan.

The news of these murders distresses the Prophet greatly, but it is no time for vengeance.

Close upon these disasters comes the demand of the Banu Nadzir, a powerful tribe of the Jews, for the blood money of two men accidentally killed by Amir Ummaya on his way back to Medina. Under the law the money is due and is paid in full.

In order to celebrate the conclusion of the negotiations, the Nadzir arrange a feast in

honour of the Prophet and Abu Bakr. Incidentally, they collect a large quantity of stone and brick upon the roof for sport. As the guests assemble, the Prophet notices sinister movements on the roof and rightly suspects treachery. Calling Abu Bakr aside, slips out unnoticed and hurries back to Medina. The Banu Nadzir, cheated of their prey, realise that Muhammad will soon return, and so, with all haste, shut themselves up in their fortress.

The followers of the Prophet are indignant at the outrage. Umar swears vengeance upon the Jews. Mobilisation is speedy and Muhammad returns to the Banu Nadzir in force. The Muslims lay siege to the Jewish stronghold, and wreck havoc upon the countryside. They cut down palm trees, as well as the crops of the Jews.

A Jew once sold his Saviour for a few pieces of silver, and every event in the life of a Jew is reckonable in terms of money. Where money is precious so too is life, for money and life assume a direct proportion to each other. The Prophet of Islam has cut a few trees, he may cut a few heads, and heads are more valuable than trees. An evening's amusement has gone too far, and so, after six days' siege, the Banu

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Nadzir, sue for peace. Umar and Ali want to settle the issue once and for all, and would like to exhibit a few Jewish noses in Medina. But the Prophet has no desire for blood. The Jews have surrendered, and that is victory enough. He makes the Banu Nadzir pay a handsome penalty, and returns to Medina laden with much spoil.

Surrounded as he is by treachery, is it any wonder that some times Muhammad gives way to expressions of bitterness and hate, and, on occasions, thirsts for revenge? What is more natural, for his enemies conspire his death, they have murdered in cold blood several of his followers, and unite in intrigue against the dominion of Islam? But Uhud has materially weakened his authority. Nor is Medina in a position to vindicate the perfidy of the Banu Amir or avenge the death of the preachers sent to Al-kada. Muhammad would not be human if, in the face of these iniquities, his impotence did not at times turn to hate. Occasionally, therefore, he prays for the wrath of Allah upon his enemies. "Strike them," he cries, "as they strike down Your followers, punish them for the wrongs they do. Destroy them, as they seek to destroy Your Prophet."

WARRIOR

But Allah brooks no interference with his affairs, not even from His Apostle. Muhammad receives a sharp rebuke: "Surely they are unjust, but you have no concern whether He treats them with mercy or chastises them." As in the incident of the blind man, the Koran records, for all time, the rebuke of Allah to the Prophet Muhammad. But while these rebukes record testimony to his human weaknesses, his hate and irritation, they are also testimony to his exotic honesty and truthfulness.

[2]

The expedition against the Banu Nadzir has been important in another particular. Hitherto spoils of war have been distributed as four-fifths to the army and one-fifth at the disposal of the Prophet. The position of the Muhajerin, that is to say those who came with the Prophet to Medina, is still economically deplorable. There are only two ways of improving their position; either to distribute among them a substantial portion of the property owned by the Ansar, or to give them a major share in the spoils taken in war. The matter is settled by a magnanimous gesture on the part of the Ansar, who agree that all the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

spoil taken in war, may be distributed at the discretion of the Prophet. A *Sura* of the Koran now makes it lawful for this to be done. The Muhajerin, accordingly, receive the whole of the spoil received from the Banu Nadzir. The Ansar are aware of the plight of the Muhajerin and are sufficiently large-hearted to applaud this act of justice.

But is it just large heartedness on the part of the Ansar, that make them forgo, in its entirety, the rich booty taken from the Nadzirites Jews? Or is there rather something in the magnetism of the pontiff-king, who inspires men to do and act above the level of the common place? Muhammad has travelled a long way since he roamed about the Meccan hills a dreamer, living his hopes and his visions. It is indeed a long time since he sat upon Mount Arafat and looked over the valley, in which Mecca nestled below, brooding over the vandalism of the temple of Abraham. It is a long time, when, exotic in temperament, his heart yearned over the land, when he saw Arabia no longer torn with strife, but all at peace under the rule of a strong hand, the worship of the one God restored to its place in the diurnal worship of the ancient Ka'ba; the multitude

free to worship as they please, unhindered and unmulcted; the wise bowing before the Master of the universe, the Spirit of Spirits; the women of his race honoured as the mothers of brave sons; all Arabia united under the banner of Al Islam carrying the message of peace to the four corners of the world. Yes, it is a long time since he dreamed these dreams. Time has brought into realisation a large measure of his hopes. Much yet remains to be fulfilled. Yes, it was a grand dream; it was something to have seen it, it is infinitely grandeur to have been an instrument in its realisation.

After Badr, the completion of his plans seemed only a matter of a few years. Since Uhud, however, the horizons appear to have receded behind the clouds. Treachery snake-like crawls through the state. It makes its appearance where least expected and strikes when its opponent is off his guard. The Prophet's enemies at the moment are legion. They teem within and without the walls of Medina,—Arab, Jew and Christian alike.

The hostility of the Arab is understandable. The Prophet has weened a large and influential section of opinion to Islam; he has split the authority of the Quraish and set up

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

an independent kingdom in Medina; he has introduced radical changes into the laws of inheritance, and the institution of marriage; he has ruthlessly swept ancient time-honoured practices into oblivion; he has denounced paganism and the gods of his race. If the Arabs desire to coalesce in an effort to destroy him, as a common enemy, though erroneous, they are pardonably human.

The hostility of the Jew, however, is not so easy of comprehension, in view of the circumstances in which he finds the fullest freedom of conscience. But is friendship or dislike invariably governed by a rule of reason? A dog licks the hand of the master, who ill-treats it; a reptile bites at its benefactor. Men too often hate those who befriend them, and ingratitude is no uncommon trait.

And thus with the Jews of Medina, the liberties, granted to them by the new ruler, have long been forgotten. They conspire with the tribes hostile to Islam, and with the Quraish in particular. Certain events have added fuel to their hate,—the execution of the poet Ka'b and the similar fate of Abu Rafi Sallam, another Jew of talent. The Jewish intrigue has, since the expulsion of the Banu Nadzir, moved

from the surface to the underground; but it is no less determined. The Jewish effort is now directed to the dissemination of discord among Muslims. In Medina itself, the Jews lose no opportunity to libel the Prophet, defame his immediate companions, and mispronounce the Koran, wantonly effecting pedantic meanings into its text. By reason of their superior education, intelligence and resources, the seeds of disaffection are widely sown. Medina is transformed into an amphitheatre of intrigue, sedition and secret revolt.

The first definite challenge in this direction came from the Banu Qainuqa, a tribe living on the outskirts of Medina. Their hostility was so much a matter of concern to those charged with the safety of the city, that the Prophet had to serve an ultimatum requiring that they should either vacate their territories, or join the commonwealth by becoming Muslims.

The answer of the Banu Qainuqa was defiant: "Muhammad, do not be elated about your victory over the Quraish. That was an affair with men ignorant of the arts of war. If you are anxious to meet us, we will show you that victory is not so cheaply won."

Having delivered the reply, the Banu

Qainuqa locked themselves up in their fortress, and sent word to the Prophet to come and take them out, if he could. The gauntlet, so confidently hurled by the Jews, had perforce to be taken up, and an army from Medina laid siege to the Banu Qainuqa. The struggle, however, was not long drawn: within a fortnight along with their women and children, the tribe marched out for good from the dominions of Medina. Muhammad could have dealt with them as David dealt with the Ammonites, by roasting them in brick kilns. But once again Muhammad's clemency had the better of his judgment. He simply ordered the Banu Qainuqa to clear out. They lost no time in vacating their territories, lest he changed his mind, in the meanwhile.

[3]

It is unnecessary to detail all the skirmishes of the next twelve to eighteen months. The fourth and fifth years of the *Hijra* find the Prophet still the centre of the Quraish-cum-Jewish intrigue. The Nadzir, the Qainuqa and such poets, as have not been permitted to exhibit their lyrical talent in Medina, move from place to place, to Khaibar, and to other Jewish

fortresses. Everywhere they raise the alarm of the impending ruin of the Arab race, the urgency of uniting against Muhammad, their common enemy. Animated by revenge, they paint the Prophet of Islam as a tyrant, who deftly employs the veil of religion to conceal the face of ambition. They represent him as a ruthless and a remorseless tyrant, ready to put fetters upon the whole of his race, a race which has hitherto successfully resisted all attempts at conquest. They paint the tableau of Islam triumphant, with Muhammad in the temple of the Ka'ba, a sword red with Arab blood, their gods upset and mingled with the debris of their altars.

The reality of the peril inspires Meccans to further exertions. They are glad of the alliance with the Jews. This confederation is also popular among the Jews, who see in it the only possible chance of the erasing, from the slate of history, the now hateful names of Muhammad and Islam. Into the confederacy come also other tribes. A vast army mobilises for the common cause—the march on Medina.

The *Suras* of the Koran of this period speak of the machinations of the enemies of Islam and exhort Muslims to remain united. "O you who believe, be careful in your duty to

God and hold fast to the covenant of Allah, and be not disunited. You Muslims are the best of the nations raised up, and they (the Jews) shall by no means harm you." Muslims are advised not to accept the friendship of persons other than Muslim, for "you will love them, while they do not love you. When they meet you, they say 'we believe,' and when they are alone, they bite the ends of their fingers in rage against you. Tell them: 'Die in your rage; surely Allah knows what is in each man's heart.'"

The Inspirer of the Koran is not surprised at the attitude of the Jews. It is nothing new in their psychology: "But if they reject you, so indeed were rejected before you other Prophets, who came with clear arguments and illuminating scriptures. You will certainly hear from those, who were given inspiring Books before you, and from those, who are polytheists much annoying talk, but if you are patient and guard against evil, then surely, this will be one of the affairs, which will be determined upon by Us." The ultimate triumph of the Faithful is never in doubt, but they must remain steadfast in their loyalty to the Prophet, and be ever ready to cheerfully encounter difficulties on the road

to success. "O you who believe! Be patient, and vie with each other in endurance; remain steadfast and be also careful in your duty to Allah, so that you may be successful." Great is the reward promised to the Faithful, here and in the hereafter, for, "whoever fights in the cause of Allah, whether he be slain or be he victorious, Allah will bestow upon him great reward."

For the first time, in the history of Islam, comes a positive injunction to believers to fight. "Fight," says the Koran, "against the friends of the devil. Fight them in Allah's way. Whoever joins in a good cause will have a share of it. While whoever joins an evil cause will also have a share of it." "It is no use fearing death, for when Allah has willed death, it will overtake you, though you have raised towers around you." The Faithful are reminded that, "were it not for Allah's grace and mercy, a party of the unbelievers would certainly have succeeded in the destruction of the Faithful. But with Allah on the side of the Faithful, the enemy will bring nothing to perdition, other than their own souls." "O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are no friends of each other, and whoever takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them."

At about this time, further important additions to the social laws of Medina are introduced. These relate to murder, bodily injury, and to slavery.

Says the Koran, "Slay no one whom God has forbidden you to slay, except for a just cause. And whoever is slain wrongfully, we have given his next of kin the right to be avenged." "It is not for a believer to kill a believer save by mistake." "Retaliation is prescribed for you; the free for the free, the slave for the slave, the female for the female."

The punishment prescribed for intentional or wilful murder in the Koran is death. The free for the free, the slave for the slave and a female for a female. But these words are not to be construed too strictly, for, a man may be required to pay the extreme penalty, not only for a man, but also for a woman. The Islamic law is, however, distinguishable from the laws of the Romans, Jews and Egyptians. The life of the slayer is forfeited to the kinsmen of the slain, who may accept satisfaction for the murder in money. But once having accepted payment, revenge upon the murderer is forbidden. There is, of course, no penalty for

the slayer of an unbeliever in war.

Several distinctions are made in cases of death caused intentionally. The latter wrongs are generally compoundable by a money payment, which is a great improvement upon the Mosaic and Hammurabi codes. The *lex talionis*, or the law of retaliation, is not confined to the taking of life, but extends also to injuries short of death. "If you make reprisals," says the Koran, "then make them to the extent that you are injured. But it is surely better if you can endure patiently." "We have enacted in the *Torah* a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and for wounds retaliation. But whoever remits his injury as alms will have expiation of his sins."

It was Aristotle who maintained that slavery is based on nature, and that certain races were intended to be slaves. Whatever the reason behind this view, the Prophet regards slavery as a social iniquity, which calls aloud for reform. In the Roman law, it is recognised as an institution, both natural and legitimate. For centuries slavery has also been part and parcel of the social system of the Jews, the institution finding a conspicuous place in the *Deuteronomy*. Jesus came to fulfil the law, and though his

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

tender heart often melted at the suffering of slaves, he did nothing to improve their status. On the contrary, the institution of slavery received full recognition, the Church itself engaging in the slave trade. In the *Digest* compiled under the authority of the Christian Justinian, slavery will be found recognised as a part of the law of nature.

In Muhammad's eyes, however, the institution has few redeeming features. Once there came to him a person who asked him: "Point out to me a deed, which will bring me nearer Paradise and take me further from the fires of Hell."

"Free a slave," the Prophet replied, "or ransom a captive; but the most beloved of all deeds with God is giving liberty to a slave."

A story is related how once Abu Masud, an Ansar, while beating a slave, was surprised by the Prophet: "Abu Masud, God is more powerful over you than you are over your slave."

Abu Masud turned round to see the intruder. He saw the Prophet and was ashamed, volunteering for the sake of God and the Prophet to release his slave. "You had better," said the Prophet, "unless you want to roast within the Fire."

The new laws regarding slavery, therefore, demand the same just and humane treatment for slaves, as is prescribed for widows and orphans. These laws also set out various manners in which slaves may procure their freedom. A slave may be emancipated by his master; he may claim emancipation for reasons of special service rendered by him; or he may secure his liberty by a money payment. Once a slave has obtained his freedom, no stigma of any kind attaches to him on account of his having been once a slave: he is entitled to all the rights and privileges of the most exclusive members of his tribe. If a Muslim, he may even claim to marry the most elect of maidens. In order to educate public opinion and set a definite example, the Prophet gave his cousin, the lady Zainab, in marriage to Zaid his adopted son, who, it will be remembered, was once a slave.

[5]

The reference to Zaid brings us once again, to the private and domestic affairs of the Prophet during this period. Before the Battle of Badr, the Prophet had two wives Sauda and Ayesha. Later, Hafsa, the tempestuous daughter of Umar, was added to his household. In the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

next eighteen months or so, three more ladies have joined the connubial group. The first of these was Zainab, the widow of Abdullah-ibn Jash, who gave his life for Islam upon the field of Uhud. Juwairiya, daughter of Harith, came in the wake of the campaigns against the recalcitrant tribes in the neighbourhood of Medina. In the battle against the Banu Mustaliq, over six hundred captives were taken by the Muslim army, and of these prisoners, the most important were Harith-ibn A'bi Dzirar, the chief of the rebel tribe, and his daughter Juwairiya. In the discussions after the battle, it was arranged that both the lady and her father should embrace Islam, and she would enter into matrimony with the head of Islam. The result was a happy occasion for the tribe, for by this alliance they secured their freedom.

The matter of the Prophet's cousin, the lady Zainab, has not been an affair so easy of settlement. Zainab, as the grand-daughter of Abdul Muttalib, is fair of form, intelligent and educated in the Arabic script. She can recite the Koran; her close relationship with the Prophet gives her an important status among the women of Medina. For years she has had a deep attachment for her cousin, the Prophet. His achieve-

ments have meant much to her; and, in her youthful heart, she has hoped that he would some day espouse her. But the Prophet, as the head of Islam, had other plans for her. There was Zaid, the freed man, who was one of the earliest believers in his mission, a man whose loyalty was above reproach, and who had been his companion in many perilous adventures. The Prophet proposed to reward Zaid by presenting his cousin Zainab in marriage. When the proposition was broached to the lady, both she and her brother were opposed to the suggestion; but, as the Prophet's command could not be disobeyed, Zainab went to Zaid.

The union, however, was not a happy one. Zainab, with all her learning and capacity for reasoning, was a woman first. She compared the family from which she came with that of Zaid; she looked at herself in the mirror and noted marked disparities. Zaid too found little happiness in his marriage. For his simple ways, his wife was somewhat self-opinionated. Matters went from bad to worse, until they reached a climax, when, by chance, Muhammad happened one day to see the lady Zainab and made an exclamatory observation upon her appearance. Zainab's vanity now knew no bounds, poor

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Zaid coming in for a more uncomfortable time than ever. In desperation, he went to the Prophet, and asked to be relieved of his fair burden.

"Why?" demanded the Prophet, "Have you found any fault with her?"

"No," replied Zaid, "but we cannot live together any longer."

"Go," said the Prophet, "guard your wife and treat her well."

Zaid went home and did his best. But the matrimonial chariot refused to run any better. After considerable effort, Zaid decided that the best way out of their difficulties would be to give Zainab her freedom; and so, without permission from the Prophet, he divorced his wife. Zainab lost no time in departing; as she left, Zaid heaved a sigh of relief. He was pleased with her beauty, but better pleased with her absence.

Zainab, however, had not driven Zaid to divorce her for nought. Her heart was full of that feminine want, such as women only know, for her cousin Muhammad. After the prescribed period of the *iddat* she expressed a wish that the Prophet should marry her; and, as her wishes could not now be treated with indifference, she entered his house as his fifth wife.

The marriage, however, creates a sensation among the people of Medina, for Zaid has been looked upon as a son of the Prophet. While popular opinion still tolerates the pagan custom that a mother-in-law is lawful, as also a man may sample his father's favourites and marry his step-mothers, a union between a divorced wife of an adopted son by the adoptive father is still unacceptable to their susceptibilities. These notions were impliedly swept away when it was held that an adopted son is not, for all purposes, a real son. Instinctively, however, the old idea persists, and many unkind tongues wag at the marriage of the Prophet to Zainab. The matter is settled by a revelation: "When Zaid had accomplished his want of her," says the Revealer, "We gave her to you as a wife, so that there should be no difficulty for the believers in respect of the wives of their adopted sons, when they have accomplished their want of them."

There is also, about this time, another incident, which causes a ruffle in the Prophet's domestic affairs. The latter occurred on the way back from Muraisi, after the defeat of the Banu Mustaliq. Ayesha, who had accompanied the Prophet, was left behind, as the army started

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

upon a day's march. The camel driver, taking it for granted that she was in her palanquin, moved off without her. As a matter of fact she was then hunting for a necklace which she had dropped behind a friendly bush. The unfortunate camel driver did not discover his loss till the end of the day's march, or, if he discovered it earlier, he was too terrified to speak about it. Meanwhile Ayesha, distracted and worried, was discovered by Safwan-ibn Muattal, a young captain in the Muslim army. Safwan brought her safe and harmless to the Prophet. That a night has intervened, and Safwan-ibn Muattal is known for his good looks set slandering tongues awag. Abdullah-ibn Ubbay found, in the occasion, a particular opportunity to damage the reputation of the Prophet's household. Ayesha, on her return, was closely questioned by her husband, her father and by her mother. Ayesha explained the incident in the following words: "Every time the Prophet is called upon to undertake an expedition, there is rivalry among his favourite wives to accompany him. We usually draw lots, and, on this occasion, the lots declared in my favour. I went veiled in the covered litter provided for the wife of the Prophet. On the return journey, just as the

army was about to set upon its return march, a certain want made me descend. When the troops had passed, I went to remount. I then saw that I had dropped my necklace, and I went back hurriedly to find it. While I was looking for my lost article of jewellery, the soldiers placed my litter on the camel and led it off. They were not struck by its lightness, as we carry little on our journeys and I am known to be of very light weight. The search for the necklace proved successful, and I returned happily to take my seat in the litter, when, to my dismay, I found both litter and camel gone. I called out; there was no reply. I filled the air with my cries, but no one heard me. I hoped I would soon be missed and my camel would be sent back for me, but no one returned. Tired of calling and waiting I sat down and fell asleep. Safwan, who was in charge of the rear guard happened to pass by, and, seeing me unveiled, recognised me. He waited while I slept. When I awoke he said, 'We are the children of Allah, and to Him we shall return.' I swear before Heaven that there was no other conversation between him and me. I promptly covered myself with my veil and sat upon his camel, he helping me to get up. Safwan led the camel

by the bridle until we rejoined the army."

Ayesha's manner was persuasive, there was nothing guilty about her demeanour. An unfortunate incident to be sure, but such as might happen anywhere to anyone. The Prophet felt that she was telling the truth; he also knew Safwan to be honourable and upright and was convinced that he had not exceeded his duties as a warrior and a friend. A revelation removed all possible doubt by clearing the fair Ayesha's name of all suspicion.

One unfortunate result, however, of this incident is the strained relationship between Ayesha and Ali. Ayesha feels that the close interrogation, to which she has been subjected, was inspired by Ali. Perhaps Ali has been too punctilious in a matter that did not directly concern him, and insisted on a more detailed enquiry than the Prophet, left to himself, would have been satisfied with. Perhaps Ayesha, in her humbled pride, puts Ali's well-meaning suspicions in the same category as the slander of Abdullah-ibn Ubbay.

There has never been much regard lost between her and Ali; from now onwards she makes no secret of her feelings.

But nothing can change the Prophet's opi-

nion of Ali, nor Ali's regard for the Prophet. His marriage to Fatima, the Prophet's favourite daughter, has united him in a tight bond of union with his beloved leader.

[6]

The Prophet is not in the dark as to the preparations afoot for the third invasion of Medina. His emissaries keep him fully conversant with the intrigues of the Jews and the confederacy formed by the Quraish against him. We have seen other occasions when, the situation having arisen, Muhammad the dreamer was transformed into Muhammad the man of action, the determined and skilled general of armies. Now too, he carefully surveys the situation, and, in good margins of time, prepares his defence. He realises the futility of defending all his territories against forces so greatly superior in men and arms. He, therefore, decides to content himself by holding Medina, and sets about to fortify his position, within the walls of the city. He is fortunate in having available at hand the services of Salman, the Persian, who at one time served as a governor in Persia. Salman is acquainted with the more up-to-date methods of warfare, and advises the Prophet to dig a deep moat

round the city. This is a new orientation in the science of warfare as known to the Arabs. The whole of Medina turns out like a swarm of bees to work on the lines indicated by the Persian. On all sides are sounds of spades and pick-axes, the shouts of the workers urging each other to more strenuous efforts. The Prophet sets an example by wielding an axe and shovel himself. The soil is hard and rocky, but nothing deters him. If there is an obstacle, he hurries thither, and, as if nature bowed to him, one by one the difficulties of the task are eliminated. Thus, the great moat grows wider and deeper. It is his ardour that is the charm, the intoxicant, the prodigious cause of seeming miracles.

At length all is ready for the Meccan onslaught,—moat, arms and provisions for a long siege.

Muhammad can now lean back and await Abu Sufyan with confidence. He has not, however, long to wait. The horizon blackens with clouds of dust, raised by a mighty host that marches nearer and nearer. Some estimate the horde at ten thousand, others are sure that there is not a man less than twenty thousand. Soon other parts of the landscape are also dotted with

lines of approaching armies. There come the Banu Ghatafan and the army of the Banu Nadzir, followed soon after by other Jews under the leadership of Ka'b-ibn Asad. The entire fields around Medina bristle with the tents of the enemy, whose newly burnished shields and spears reflect the sun, like tongues of fire. The earth seems thick with a fantastic forest of sabres and lances. The air resounds with voices like the ebullient burst of thunder. Medina is impressed. The city is petrified in silence.

"They come upon you from above and from below, and eyes turn dull, and hearts rise up to the throat, and you begin to think diverse thoughts about Allah."

Some of his followers hint to the Prophet that they should seek safety in flight. The confederate army is one of the largest ever assembled in the history of Arabia. The besieged are comparatively ill-equipped, ill-manned and inexperienced. The Jews of the neighbourhood, the Banu Quraiza, who could at this time render valuable assistance by active support, or at any rate by their neutrality, throw aside all pledges and pacts to join the Allies. Muhammad beseeches Sad-ibn Mu'adh and Sad-ibn Ubeida to negotiate with them and to endeavour

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

to keep them of their agreements with Medina. The reply of the Quraiza is: "Who is your Muhammad and your Apostle of God, that we should obey him? Get you gone; there is no bond or agreement between us."

When the attitude of the Jews is known, it spells consternation in the Muslim camp. Perfidy? Yes, perfidy. Ingratitude? Yes, ingratitude. But was there ever the like of this before?

Meanwhile in the midst of this treachery, and the panic stricken clamours of his own followers, the Chief Warrior and Generalissimo of Islam is setting an example of supreme fortitude. Serenity sits undisturbed upon his brow. He makes his decisions and gives his orders in astonishing tranquillity.

Having entrusted the government of Medina to Ibn-Om Mukatam, he devotes himself entirely to the conflict. He disposes his army of three thousand men in suitable positions in the ramparts of the city, with orders to give battle, if the enemy should attempt to cross the moat. The Allies make several attempts to draw the Muslims from their fortifications. Muhammad, however, refuses all temptations to fight the enemy, except on his own terms. Every attack upon the moat is repulsed with heavy

loss to the Confederacy. Now and again, there is a rain of arrows, the charge of horsemen, the movement of great companies of men;—but, for all his stratagems, Abu Sufyan finds Medina impregnable.

The blockade lasts nearly a month, with immaterial results. As each day goes by, the morale of the Confederacy degenerates, while the hope of the beleaguered becomes stronger. Division also appears in the ranks of the enemy. The Prophet is not slow to take advantage of the situation. He has proved his worth in many roles before, he now establishes his credit as a negotiator. He breaks up the coalition of his enemies into its several component segments. The leaders of the Quraish make a desperate attempt to check the disunion, growing rife in their midst; but the seeds of dissension are well-sown.

About the same time, the elements of nature also seem to enter into conspiracy against Mecca and her friends. Great black clouds obscure the sun. The earth grows dark and big drops of rain clatter upon shield and armour. There is hurried retreat to tents and shelter. A wild wind flaps the tents ominously. Rain pours down sheetwise—mercilessly flooding

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

camp and moat alike. Evening sees all the fury of nature unleashed; the storm becomes a hurricane; a terrific wind whistles through the night, blowing rain through armour, upsetting tents, and chilling the flesh to the bone.

And as the morning sun steals over grey clouds, painting the world a mass of gold and amber, early risers in Medina are overjoyed to see the great Quraish host marching away to the southward. Their allies seem to have vanished with the storm. The news is correct. The Confederate army is in retreat. And thus, melts away for ever the dream of the Quraish to vanquish Islam. It is a crestfallen Abu Sufyan and a despondent army that returns to Mecca. The gods of the Ka'ba hang their heads in despair.

[7]

Medina is naturally overjoyed. But victory does not seem complete until scores have been levelled with the perfidious Banu Quraiza. If it had not been for the sheerest good fortune, the Banu Quraiza would have delivered Medina over to the enemy. The Muslim army is tired; it would welcome the opportunity of putting aside its accoutrements of war, and celebrating

victory in the arms of their favourite women. But this must be deferred for a few days yet. First, the Banu Quraiza must furnish an explanation of their behaviour. The Muslim army, accordingly, lays siege to the Jews in their fortress. The trial of strength is not a prolonged affair. Within the short space of twenty-five days, the whole tribe, seven hundred men and an equal number of women and children, have surrendered.

The question now is how to suitably punish them? Perhaps the Quraiza believe that in their case, as in cases of others before them, the heart of the Prophet will incline towards clemency and they will be asked to depart out of the territories of Medina. Perhaps if the matter rested with the Prophet alone, he may still be inclined to treat them with leniency and banish them; but Umar and other chieftains are determined to exact from the Banu Quraiza the full price of their treachery. In the midst of the discussions, it is suggested that the matter should be left to the decision of a mutual friend of the parties. The Jews cordially approve of the idea and nominate Sad-ibn Mu'adh as arbitrator, who is also accepted by the Muslims. The Jews are confident that the arbitrator will decide in their

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

favour, but, unfortunately for them, do not know that Sad has been dangerously wounded in the siege of Medina, and ascribes his condition to the intrigues of the Jews, regarding them as the real authors of the war.

Sad is brought with difficulty to the assembly. The dispute is explained to him. The Quraiza plead with him to show them compassion and generosity, reminding him of the ties of friendship between these tribes and his father. The eyes of the whole assembly gather upon Sad. What will be his verdict?

In measured tones the Prince gives his decision: "In the scriptures of the Jews it is written that 'when the Lord hath delivered thine enemy into thy hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword. But the women, the children and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all of the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself, and thou shalt eat the spoils of thine enemy, which the Lord thy God hath given thee.' Even so shall it be dealt with the Banu Quraiza, which is lawful by their scriptures. Every male shall be smitten with the sword, every woman and child shall be taken into captivity, and so may you take to yourselves the goods and chattels of your

WARRIOR

captives."

A hush falls upon the great assembly. Then there is the weeping and wailing of women and children.

As evening falls seven hundred graves have been dug, one beside another, in seven long lines of a hundred each. The whole of Medina is out to watch the end of the traitors. In the crowd drawing their own conclusions are Jews, Christians and Sabeans. There are the elect of the city, and the chiefs of the neighbouring tribes. One by one each captive is brought forward to the edge of the grave in which he is to lie. He struggles, begs for mercy; strong hands hold him down. A sharp knife gleams, there is a muffled scream, a squirt of blood, a head tumbles into the pit. And then the next; and the next; and so on seven hundred.

And thus is Jewish treachery determined in the manner of the Jews.

CHAPTER VI.

CONQUEROR

The victory of Ahzab, or the battle of the Moat, has established the status of Islam and added lustre to the fame of its Prophet. From all parts of Arabia, flock admirers to see this wonderous man, who combines in his person the austerity of the anchorite, the wants of the man in the street, the brilliance in arms of Alexander, the eloquence of Cicero, the kindness of Jesus, and the authority of Cæsar. A man, who in peace, is a gentle teacher in the ways of God, an enlightened administrator, a fair judge and a compassionate ruler. A man, who in war, is a master of strategy, steadfast, imperturbable, essentially rational and practical. A man, whose preaching is in consonance with his life; whose religion is for actual living men, not for angels; whose God is indulgent and merciful. A man, whose life is an open book to his followers: when he makes a decision it is in open conference; there are no clandestine motives lurking in his breast. His followers are

CONQUEROR

his confidants, his colleagues and his friends. When he wants them to adopt a course of conduct, he himself sets the example,—whether it is in dealings with women, with neighbouring tribes or with the enemy. When he errs—and it is but human to err,—his shame and repentance are public. He prays because he wants men to pray; he fasts because he wants men to fast; he gives in charity, because he wants men to be charitable; he discharges slaves, so that his followers may do the same; he marries and begets children, for he regards this as essential in the scheme of creation; and works with his own hands, establishing the dignity of labour. Such is Muhammad the man, Muhammad the apostle, and Muhammad the conqueror. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Koran has said: "Certainly you have in the Apostle of Allah an excellent example." This testimony is no exaggeration; he is at once the excellent exemplar and the choice model.

The world seems to exist for the excellent; it appears to make the earth wholesome. It is natural to believe in great men. We call our children and our streets by their names, we place their works and effigies in our houses, and the events of the day recall anecdotes of their

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

greatness. Upon their credit flourishes the race. The knowledge that in the city there is a man of outstanding merit raises the credit of its citizens. If the companions of our childhood should turn out to be heroes, and their condition regal, it should not surprise us, for the search after greatness is the dream of youth, and the most serious occupation of manhood.

Muhammad is now the great man of the century. The one time dreamer, the outlaw, the crazy preacher, is monarch, temporal and spiritual. He is the centre of the assembly, the gaze of the populace, the hero of the young and old. People flock from all parts of the country to hear his preachings; they are immeshed in the webs of his eloquence.

Medina is proud of him, proud of her discovery, delighted in the triumph of her belief in his destiny. The events of six years, the circumstances of his rule and his personality have combined in developing him as the pattern ruler. He has demonstrated the virtues of his race and the conditions for their activity. In Mecca too, there is a reversion of feeling in his favour. Many delight in his story; they see in it their own history in part. Muhammad is no saint. The common man finds in him the qualities and

CONQUEROR

attributes of other men in the street; Muhammad himself lays no claim to aristocracy of birth and fortune. He indulges in all those tastes which the common man possesses. Victory has not transformed him into a demi-god. It has only emphasised what any plain man may accomplish. Muhammad's power owes its origin to the fidelity with which he expresses the times, thought and belief, the aims and aspirations, the lives and hopes of the masses of his race. In him, Arabia now sees the herald of an era of brilliant triumph and astounding greatness.

Having established his supremacy over the Confederacy, the subjugation of smaller recalcitrant units is comparatively easy. Slowly and surely, the dominion of Islam spreads like an octopus in all directions. It meets no substantial opposition. In the sixth year of the *Hijra* the Prophet sends Ibn Salame, at the head of a detachment of cavalry, against the Banu Bakr. Ibn Salame travels during the night, and rests during the day, surprises and scatters the enemy. Within a few days, he is back in Medina with spoils of fifty camel and three thousand sheep. He makes a present of the Bakrite chief to the Prophet. But Muhammad seeks no revenge; torture affords him no pleasure. On the con-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

trary, he takes delight in mercy. He treats his prisoner with veneration for his age and respect for his position. Themama is moved beyond words. He wishes to surrender his conscience to Islam and to join the Prophet in alliance. Themama is, accordingly, restored to the chieftainship of his tribe. When he returns to his people to raise the standard of Islam among them, he is not slow to exhibit the fervour and enthusiasm of the new Muslim. Islam has performed, once again, its miracle—the overnight transformation of the foe into the devoted friend. Themama becomes the implacable enemy of the Quraish, as he was of the Muslims, a few days earlier. His territories border on the caravan routes from the north to Mecca. He blockades these routes, setting the authority of Mecca at naught. The Meccans find, in due course, their supplies run short, while famine stares them in the face. Themama is unmoved at their plight. As a last resort, they appeal to Muhammad, beseeching him to intercede with the Bakrite chief. The Prophet's heart is touched with their suffering, and he writes to Themama just two sentences: "Preserve my people. Allow their convoys to pass." Themama obeys the Prophet's command, which saves

Mecca from starvation.

To some the Prophet's tenderness and readiness to forgive is almost womanish. Such occasions are becoming almost legion in number. They are in sharp contrast to the established practices of his own people, the Christians, as well as the Jews. When any punitive expedition sets forth, its captain receives a direct injunction from the Prophet not to molest non-belligerents and persons confined in domestic seclusion—women, children and those ill in bed. In particular, his captains have express directions "in no case must you use deceit or perfidy, or kill any child." People mark the distinction in the mandate of Muhammad as compared to the command of a Prophet of the Israelites: "Thus, saith the Lord of Hosts—'Now go and smite the Amalik, and utterly destroy all that they have and spare them not. But slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass'."

Tenderness of temperament is, of course, to be expected of the man, who is constantly reiterating that the path to God is by helping the orphan, relieving the needy and ransoming the slave. His sympathy and his love are not confined within narrow bounds, nor do they ex-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

tend merely to his own fellow beings. His sympathy and his love embrace the whole of creation; the bird and the beast share in his pity. "Fear God," he has told his people, "with regard to animals; ride those that are fit to be ridden, and get off when they are tired. There is no beast on earth, nor bird which flies with its wings, but the same is a people like unto you—and unto Allah they shall return."

[2]

It is now about six years since the Prophet and his faithful followers left Mecca. They long for a visit to the sacred Temple of the Ka'ba. In Medina there is peace. The neighbouring tribes, temporarily at any rate, plan no new campaign. The month of pilgrimage is drawing near, and Muhammad hopes to be able to satisfy the wishes of his people in regard to this matter. At about this time, it is revealed to him: "You will enter into the Temple of Mecca, if Allah pleases, in security and without fear. Allah knows what you do not know,— he prepares for you a great victory."

The revelation is received with general rejoicing, and is widely taken as a prophecy that a new triumph for Islam awaits fulfilment. The news of the revelation spreads from Medina to

Mecca like wild fire. In Medina there are joyous preparations among Muhajareen and Ansar alike; virtually the whole city makes ready to embark upon the pilgrimage. Mecca hears the news with fear and consternation. Is it an invasion in the garb of a pilgrimage? Warfare is prohibited in the sacred month, but Mecca feels she cannot be too sure of Muhammad. The Quraish are in genuine alarm. The Prophet, however, has no intentions whatever of conquest; revenge is equally remote from his mind. He wishes only to revisit his beloved Mecca, the place of his birth, the scene of so many associations dear to him; he wants to traverse the mounts of Safa and Arafat, and to kiss the corner of the Ka'ba's sacred stone. Allah has vouchsafed victory to him in its plenitude. He now desires to render thanks to the divine Benefactor from the circuits of the Temple of Abraham itself.

The Prophet discusses the suspicions of the Meccans with his followers, and takes counsel with them. It is, finally, decided that only a limited number should this year perform the pilgrimage. So only two thousand pilgrims set out towards the sacred city, with the animals destined for the sacrificial offering.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

The Prophet and his followers carry no arms, except the simple swords permitted during the pilgrimage. But even the absence of regular equipment, and the obviously religious character of the procession, do not however impress the Quraish. They still suspect an ambitious plan of conquest under the guise of a pilgrimage, and decide to prevent the entry of the Muslim caravan into Mecca at all costs. The Prophet, in his heart, is also not quite sure that the Quraish will not take advantage of the unarmed Muslim pilgrims.

At a short distance from Mecca, upon the heights of Hudaibiya, the Prophet awaits the emissaries of the Quraish. He has either to stop or to give battle, for the Quraish and their allies are already in the field to dispute the right of passage. Urwa, chief of the Thaqif, is the first ambassador of the Quraish. He informs the Prophet of the pledge taken by the tribes of Mecca that his Muslims will not be allowed to enter Mecca except by force of arms. The Prophet explains to him the peaceful character of the Muslim mission and presses for permission to complete the pilgrimage.

The negotiations proceed for some days unsuccessfully, when, eventually, the leader of

CONQUEROR

the Quraish returns to his people to report to them of all that he has seen and heard.

"I was astonished," says he, "at the profound respect in which Muhammad is held by the Muslims. His smallest wants are attended to as if they were sacred duties. He sits like a god among his worshippers. I have lived at the courts of emperors; I have seen Khusru in the hey-day of his glory, I have seen Heraclius surrounded with the pomp of the Cæsars, but I have never seen a king respected by his subjects as Muhammad is by his followers."

It is the Prophet's turn now to send an emissary to the Quraish. Uthman acquits this mission with care and circumspection, but his proposals are rejected. "You Uthman," the Quraish make a distinction, "may, in your individual capacity, fulfil the sacred rites of the pilgrimage, and perform the circuits of the Temple, but we cannot allow this to Muhammad."

Uthman is annoyed at the suggestion. "God would not be pleased with me," he retorts to the Quraish, "if I accomplish my purpose before my Prophet has set the example."

Uthman's reply irritates the Quraish, who promptly put him in irons. The news of this

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

indignity nearly precipitates the parties in conflict, for the act of the Quraish is against all dealings between one nation and another. Feelings run high in the Muslim camp, and, under the shadow of a wide-spreading tree, the pilgrims assemble to swear war to the last man in the defence of their religion and the honour of their tribe, so wantonly slighted by the Quraish.

The Quraish see the futility of a conflict, the result of which they can never be too sure. Uthman is set at liberty, and Suhail-ibn 'Amr renews, on their behalf, negotiations with the Prophet. Eventually terms are agreed upon and the truce is ordered to be reduced to writing.

Ali acts as scribe and begins the document with the words, "*Bismilla-birrahma-nirrahim.*" Suhail says he cannot recognise the Islamic invocation, and insists that the document should begin with "*Bismilla Allabumma*" (In Your Name O God). "So be it," says the Prophet, and Ali heads the document accordingly. There is another hitch when the Prophet dictates, "This is an agreement made between Muhammad, the Apostle of Allah, and the Quraish."

Suhail remonstrates: "If we recognised you as the Apostle of Allah, we would not carry arms against you. Let your name be put down

as the son of your father."

The Prophet considers the matter a triviality. "Very well, just as you like."

"Write," says he, turning to Ali, "'Here following are recited the terms of peace arrived at between Muhammad-ibn Abdullah and Suhail-ibn Amr'". The terms of the Treaty are then dictated:

"Firstly, there shall be truce between the Muslims and the Quraish, and such tribes as are now in alliance with either party; the truce to be faithfully adhered to by all parties for a period of ten years. *Secondly*, Arab tribes, not at present in alliance, are free to join either party. *Thirdly*, Muhammad and his followers shall immediately quit the sacred territories of Mecca. *Fourthly*, the Muslims shall be entitled to visit the sacred city next year during the month of Al Kadr. *Fifthly*, when the Muslim pilgrims enter Mecca, they shall be unarmed, except for their swords which shall be carried fully sheathed. *Sixthly*, the Muslims shall remain in Mecca only for three days, and during this time will neither induce nor press any Meccan to leave the city against his will."

The followers of the Prophet, in particular Umar, who had interpreted the revelation, re-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

ceived in Medina, as indicating another victory over the Quraish, make no secret of their profound disappointment in the turn of events. Some even go to the length of suggesting that Allah had prepared a victory for them, which has been thrown away by the Prophet. The less discreet express their feelings more vociferously.

In vain does the Prophet urge his followers to effect the sacrifices before returning home. The silence around him is indicative of their feelings. Muhammad says no more. He performs the ablutions, has his head shaved, and, with knife in hand, cuts the necks of the camels brought by him for sacrifice. His example is irresistible and his followers are ashamed that they should have doubted him. The earth is soon inundated with the blood of the sacrificial victims. Zeal and fervour have regained their hold upon the Muslim mind. The Prophet returns to Medina with followers in no despondent mood, for, by this time, they have realised their error. Victory and a triumphant entry into Mecca was undoubtedly promised, but the revelation made no reference to this particular excursion. The Truce of Hudaibiya has now definitely fixed the event for the next year,

which will be ample confirmation of the Prophet's prognostication. There has, hitherto, been no instance when the forecasts and the promises of the Koran have not been fulfilled; why should they doubt Allah now?

[3]

Inspite of the exemplary treatment meted out to the Banu Quraiza, intrigue is still rampant among the Jewish tribes. It is apparent that the Jews will never become Muslims, nor can they ever be relied upon as allies. They still hold several redoubtable fortresses; their attitude is sullen and menacing. From the point of view of the security of Medina, therefore, the Prophet realises that there is no alternative to a general campaign against them. If the Jews will be neither co-religionists nor friends, they must be slaves.

The Prophet is no longer the chieftain of the petty rabble that fought at Badr, or of the undisciplined army that went astray at Uhud. He is now in command of an army that is impressive in numbers, well-trained and well-equipped in the accoutrements of war. He has himself, with the skill and the patience of a centurion, inculcated among his troops lessons

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

in tactics, and the manoeuvres of battle—the charge, retreat and pursuit, the use of their weapons, and evolutions upon the field. Whatever hardship he has imposed upon them, he has inflicted with equal severity upon himself; their labour, their diet, their sleep, all have been measured by inflexible rules of discipline. And, without despising the enemy, they have been taught to maintain an implicit confidence in their cause, their valour and in the wisdom of their leaders. With these resources behind him, the Prophet is advised to settle, once and for all, the problem of the Jewish peril.

Thus, at the head of four thousand infantry and two hundred cavalry, Muhammad sets out briskly from Medina, determined to return only when he has destroyed the power of the Jews. For the next few months, the Muslim army is in constant engagement,—one fortress, then another, and a third, and so on,—a procession from stronghold to stronghold. The battalions of Islam are all-conquering. Battlements crumble before their engines of war; the Jews, who resist, go down in hundreds, in the wake of Muslim arrows; great fortunes in spoil and booty fall to the invincible warriors from Medina. Naem, Alakali, Fadak, Wadi Alkora, Watish,

CONQUEROR

Salalem, and Khaibar, surrender or are captured in rapid succession. Of all these, Khaibar offered the stoutest resistance. The central gem of the fortresses of the Jews, situated high upon rocks almost impregnable, the treasure house of Arabia, for several days Khaibar defied the might of Islam. The Prophet spent many hours in his tent perplexed how to effect its capture. While he debated the merits of many plans, Abu Bakr went forward to plant the standard of Islam upon its battlements, but was, after a heroic struggle, repulsed. Umar suffered the same fate. Fortune, however, favoured the brave Ali. In various combats, he had slain great numbers of the Jews, throwing some over the battlements, and mortally wounding others. He stretched the chieftain Harith into the dust and sent Marheb, the Governor of the fortress, to meet his ancestors. Khaibar, eventually, fell to a charge led by Ali, vast treasure being taken as booty.

In the peace negotiations, the Jews of Khaibar obtained freedom from captivity, in exchange for an undertaking to pay tribute to Medina of one-half of their produce.

The campaign of Khaibar is also memorable for the marriage of the Prophet to the beau-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

tiful Jewess Safiyya. Safiyya's husband was killed in the battle and she was taken prisoner. When peace was finally settled, the Jews wished to make the new alliance doubly sure, by offering the fair Safiyya in matrimony to the Prophet. Safiyya, too, desired the union; for, since the day, when she was brought before him a captive, he became, in her eyes, all that a man should be, fair in appearance, fair in dealings, honoured among his fellow men, firm in decision, and gentle of heart. She expressed a willingness to become a Muslim for his sake. No union between a great man and a captive could be ushered in, in more promising circumstances. But the guests to the wedding feast had to bring their own meals, as the triumphant conqueror was a poor man, receiving no share in the booties of war. The feast was, nevertheless, a happy occasion for Safiyya's beauty was famous throughout the countryside, and, of the victory of Khaibar, any army might well be proud. When the guests had departed, Safiyya came to the tent of the great conqueror to live the proudest moment of her life.

A few days later, in the commemoration of peace, Zainab, the widow of Harith and sister of Marheb, both of whom fell in the siege of

CONQUEROR

Khaibar, held a feast in honour of the Prophet. When the guests had assembled, Zainab placed before them a well-roasted sheep. Hardly had the Prophet put a morsel in his mouth, when he spat it out saying that it was poisoned. In spite of the promptness of the Prophet, a quantity of the poison went down, and for days, he suffered from its effects. Bishr-ibn Bara, one of the companions of the Prophet, who swallowed a mouthful, before the Prophet had discovered the treachery, died in the acutest agony soon after. Under the law, the kinsmen of Bishr claimed and took Zainab to do with her as they willed. Zainab screamed as she saw a knife upon her white throat. It was too late to beg for mercy. A red stream trickled its way to the edge of the room. Blood had paid for blood.

[4]

The Truce of Hudaibiya, over which Umar and certain of the Faithful were so despondent, has indeed proved the harbinger of glory. Never has the name of Medina been more honoured among the cities of Arabia. Its ruler also stands high in the list of the world's successful monarchs. His triumphant conquest of the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Jews has added more lustre to his name, as also to the power of Islam.

In Mecca, many years ago, it was clear to Muhammad that the message of Islam was not meant only for the Quraish; but rather was it intended as a light and guidance to the world at large. The God of Islam was, from the outset, *Rabul-al ameen* the Lord of the Worlds. He was the *Rab-unnas*, *Malik-unnas*, *Allab-unnas*, —the Lord, King and God of men. Not of Jews, or Christians or Muslims, but the God of all creation, of every living thing. The message preached by the Prophet could, therefore, be of no parochial character. But, uptill now, no opportunity has afforded itself for the message to be delivered to any but the people of his own race.

In the general security, in which Islam finds itself, the Prophet feels that the time has come to deliver the message to other nations. During a Friday congregational prayers, he announces that he intends to send ambassadors to foreign Courts, and asks the assembly to choose suitable ambassadors. The proposal is received with acclamation.

To Khusr, King of the Persians, Abdullah-ibn Hudhafa presents a letter under the seal of

CONQUEROR

"*Mubammad-ur-Rasul-ullah*". The King orders an interpreter to read the letter, which begins with the words,

"Muhammad, Apostle of God, to Khusru,
King of Persia."

This address irritates Khusru's Majesty. He tears the letter in a rage, scattering the pieces contemptuously upon the floor. When Abdullah returns to Medina, and relates the reception he has had, the Prophet exclaims, "Allah will rend and scatter his kingdom in pieces, as he has scattered my letter."

Khusru, however, has not left matters at a mere exhibition of his rage. He has written to Bazan, his viceroy in Arabia, to arrest the mad man, who makes himself out as a Prophet and to send him at once. Soon after the return of Abdullah-ibn Hudhafa, messengers from Bazan arrive in Medina to execute the decree of Khusru. But the Persians tremble in the presence of the Prophet, for they know the power he enjoys among the Arabs.

Says the Prophet to them: "Tell Bazan that my religion and my empire will soon surpass the greatness of Khusru. Go and also tell him that I invite him to embrace Islam."

The ambassadors convey this reply to Bazan.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

In the meantime, the latter has received news of the death of Khusru, at the hands of his own son Soros, even as Khusru had killed his father Hormos before him. Bazan is free to accept the invitation of the Prophet, and openly joins the great brotherhood of Islam.

Heraclius is the second sovereign, to whom the Prophet sends an embassy. Dihya Kalbi presents the Prophet's letter in person. Cæsar receives the message with respect, which he finds couched in the following terms:

"Bismilla-birrahma-nirrahim.

Muhammad son of Abdullah, Apostle of God, to Heraclius, Emperor of the Romans, greetings. Peace be upon him, who marches with the torch of the true Faith. I invite you to Islam. Become a Muslim, and Heaven will surely reward you. If you do not submit yourself to my religion, you will appear, in the eyes of God, as guilty as the heathens. O Christians I beg of you to put an end to our differences. Let us worship only the one God. Let us place no equals with Him. If, however, you are not inclined to accept my invita-

CONQUEROR

tion to Islam, at least do this:—
accord your recognition to Medina
as a Muslim state.”

Having read the letter, Heraclius places it respectfully upon a cushion, and directs that the Muslim ambassador should be accorded the reception of an honoured guest. Dihya, accordingly, enjoys, till his departure, the sumptuous hospitality for which the court of the Cæsars is famous. The sun of Heraclius is now in its height. He is no longer the slave of indolence, the careless impotent spectator of public calamities. Gone are the languid hours of youth. The honour of Rome and of Heraclius himself have been gloriously retrieved by the exploits and trophies of several brilliant campaigns, which have invested him with the purples of victory. His advent to the ranks of Islam would immeasurably strengthen its status among the great religions of the world. But Heraclius wants time to consider, and sends Dihya back with rich presents for the Prophet. In the meanwhile, he ascertains from Abu Sufyan, who has arrived at Gaza on a trading mission, all about the Prophet and the doctrines of Islam. Abu Sufyan, in spite of his differences, reports the truth: “Yes, your Majesty, his ad-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

herents are increasing in large numbers, and so far, no one has forsaken him."

While Dihya has been at the Greek Court, Hatib has visited Mokaukas, Prince of the Copts, for the same purpose. Mokaukas detests the Greeks, in whose name he rules Egypt, but is not prepared to attract new enemies by openly declaring himself a Muslim. He receives Muhammad's ambassador, however, with honour, and responds to the invitation in the following terms:

"To Muhammad-ibn Abdullah from Mokaukas Prince of the Copts, salutations. I have read the letter in which you invite me to embrace Islam. This proposal requires the consideration which I am giving it. I know it has been prophesied that a Prophet is due, but I have believed that he would come from Syria. However this be, I have received your messenger with the honour due to an ambassador. He will present you, on my behalf, two young Copt girls of good families. In addition I am sending you a white mule, some garments made in our country,

CONQUEROR

and some excellent honey and butter."

As may be anticipated, of all the embassies the one to Abyssinia has the greatest success. The Muslim refugees to this country have already prepared much of the ground for the reception of Islam. When, therefore, Muhammad's ambassador arrives at the court, he receives a magnificent welcome. He is given the seat of honour and his smallest needs are attended to. The Emperor holds a special session of his court, and reads aloud the letter he has received from the Prophet:

"Bismilla-birrahma-nirrahim.

Muhammad, the Apostle of God, to Najashi Ashama, Emperor of Abyssinia, salutations. Glory be to God, the Unique, the Pure, the Peaceful and the Protector of the universe. I bear testimony that Jesus, the son of Mary is the spirit of God and His word. He is the son of the immaculate Virgin Mary. God created Jesus of His spirit, animating him as He animated Adam. As for me, I am a mere messenger of God; my

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

mission is to call you to follow me, to invite you to accept the cult of the one God, a God Who has no equal and Who commands all the powers of Earth and Heaven. I hope my advice will prevail."

The Emperor applies the letter to his eyes, descends from his throne, and, before his court, Jafar and the Muslim immigrants, professes the faith of a Muslim; and then dictates his reply to the Prophet in the following words:

"Bismilla-birrahma-nirrahim.

To Muhammad the Apostle of God Najashi Ashama offers salutation. Peace be with you, Apostle of God, and may the Lord bless you. I bear testimony that there is no God other than He, Who has led me to Islam. O Prophet, I have read the letter which you have sent me. What you say of Jesus is correct. He never claimed more than that for himself. I believe you are the Apostle of God, true and veracious. I have made the declaration of my faith before Jafar and my entire court. I am sending you my son

CONQUEROR

Ariha; but, if you so desire, I will come myself to render homage to you and to the truth of your teachings."

The reply from Shurahbil-ibn Amr, the Christian prince of the Banu Ghassan, is least favourable of the replies received. The Banu Ghassan hold a part of the territory in Central Arabia, their kingdom extending to the confines of Syria. Shurahbil's sarcastic reply to the Prophet's letter is: "I will come personally with my reply." On his way back the Muslim envoy is murdered by a tribesman, no doubt under the orders of the chief. When the Prophet hears of this crime, he swears vengeance upon the Banu Ghassan.

The reply of Hawaza, ruler of the province of Yemama, is equally offensive. "Tell Muhammad," it says, "I will carry war to Medina, if he speaks to me again of his religion."

"I will not afford him this honour," replies the Prophet, when told of Hawaza's threat.

The message to the King of Behrien, a country extending along the Persian Gulf, however, bears good results, the chief and his entire state becoming Muslims.

Islam is winning victories in other directions

besides. Converts are coming in large numbers from many unexpected quarters. The most important, however, of these new conversions is that of Khalid-ibn Walid. The conversion creates consternation in Mecca. The fact that a Quraish has become a Muslim is not the soreness in point, for, virtually, half the body of Muslims are converts from the Quraish, but Khalid, as the son of Walid, is heir to a conspicuous standing in his tribe. He has himself given proofs of outstanding talent. As the victor of Uhud, he is reckoned among the most brilliant of Mecca's military leaders. He is comparatively young and full of promise. He was for a long time prominent in violent opposition to the Muslims. What has induced him to abandon the faith of his fathers and the gods of his race? Is it ambition—does he see in Islam a wider amphitheatre for his talents? It is worldly gain—have the Muslims won him by promise of office or honour? But all this is gossip of the bye-lane; one of those occasions when men become worse than old women. Khalid has come into the Muslim camp voluntarily, even as Umar came and as many others have come. He has asked for no favours, he seeks no office. He is content that he has answered the

CONQUEROR

call of the heart, a reason that transcends argument. That he was, at one time, an active sabei is no disqualification, for he may now be an active Muslim. Talents shown in the service of the infidels, will now be available to the service of the Faith.

Khalid sets a vogue. Other important persons follow. There is Amr-ibn ul'As, who has twice represented the Quraish in Abyssinia against the Muslim refugees to that country. Uthman, prefect of the Temple of the Ka'ba, also follows in their footsteps. No one can suggest that Uthman has gone over to Islam for any worldly consideration, for Uthman holds one of the most important offices in Arabia, when he decides to abandon it for the yet precarious destiny of a Muslim. Muslims are, of course, overjoyed in these conversions, for they see in them the unmistakable signs of a period great in history for Al Islam.

[5]

We have noted how Khusru of Persia tore the epistle of the Prophet into fragments, which he scattered contemptuously upon the floor, and the reception accorded to the unfortunate emissary Al Harith, to Surahbil-ibn Amr ruler of Busra, who was surprised by his assassins and

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

murdered. When news of this outrage was brought to the Prophet, he determined that this crime would not go unavenged. He was not blind to the perils of the undertaking, for a war against Busra would certainly be an exacting affair, involving, in all likelihood, the antagonism of the mighty Byzantium itself. This is the first occasion in history that an Arab kingdom dares to set its face against the Empire of the Greeks. Who knows where the flames, kindled by this spark, will lead to? Who can say that this conflagration will not, in time, embrace Asia, and lay the mighty Empire of the Caesars in ashes?

The onerous nature of the undertaking does not deter the Prophet from sending an army against Busra. A force of three thousand men, under the command of Zaid, the Prophet's adopted son, is ordered to advance to Muta in Syria, and there put matters in issue—to invite the inhabitants to become Muslims, and, in case of refusal, to settle the matter in combat. There is no murmur or grumbling among those of proud Quraish descent that they have been placed under Zaid, the one time slave, for Islam has erased all such notions. The Prophet has nominated Zaid's successors, in case he should die.

CONQUEROR

Jafar-ibn Abu Talib, who has now returned from Abyssinia is to take-Zaid's place, and, if Jafar should also be unfortunate in being killed, he should be succeeded by Abdullah-ibn Rawaha.

At Muta, in the midst of the Syrian highlands, the Medinite army has its first encounter with the Græco—Roman legions. Zaid's army is weary after its long march across the burning desert; and, compared with the enemy, is numerically insignificant. But seven years' triumphs have convinced the Muslims of their invincibility. The fact of being confronted with host of a hundred thousand does not shake their self-confidence. They are as eager for battle as hounds before the hunt. To them there is no third alternative to victory and martyrdom. They are sure of a reward on earth, as a reward in the hereafter; and so, they plunge into the conflict, like lions run loose.

The battle is long and sanguine. Zaid falls a hero in the foremost ranks, bearing aloft the banner of Islam till the end. His place is promptly taken by the brave Jafar, who snatches the drooping banner from Zaid's hand. On all sides, javelins are hurtling through the air; swords are flashing in the sun, there is the din of rival combatants, fierce in mortal combat, and the moans

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

of dying steeds. The earth is red with blood. In the midst of the battle, the hand that holds the precious standard is struck off. But Jafar is undaunted; he lifts the standard high with the other hand, until that too is severed. In a final effort, he grasps the banner in his bleeding arms, until he succumbs to a multitude of blows. It is now Abdullah's turn to lead the Muslim forces. He too performs prodigious feats of valour, but, eventually, overborne by sheer strength of numbers, cheerfully sacrifices his life for Islam.

When Abdullah-ibn Rawaha too has sunk, Medina's army is without a general. Khalid runs forward, seizes the Muslim standard crying out: "Forward Muslims: Victory or Paradise is ours." With new fervour the combat is renewed. Khalid skilfully handles the men at his disposal, pierces the centre of the enemy, scatters their battalions and forces the great Græco-Roman legions to beat a retreat. Night alone steals from him the pursuit of his victory.

Khalid has given such brilliant proofs of valour and generalship that, in the nocturnal council of war, he is unanimously chosen as commander of the Muslim army. The rest of the night is devoted to the plans for the morrow.

Sunrise finds Khalid on the field of battle

CONQUEROR

already in battle trim. He has spread out his army, as much as possible. Squadrons are marching here and there and back again. From the enemy camp it looks as if reinforcements have arrived during the night, and that the Muslim army is now larger in numbers. The stratagem is successful in damping the ardour of the Greeks. Khalid does not allow much time to the enemy to deploy its forces, and directs a furious charge upon them. The Muslim army attacks in wide array from three sides. The manoeuvre has its perils, but the impetuous Khalid meets with only a feeble resistance. The Greeks are soon in riotous flight, leaving behind both arms and baggage.

Khalid returns to Medina, laden with spoil at the head of a victorious army. Henceforth, he is to bear the famous surname of *Saifullah*, the "Sword of God", for, in the campaign, he has combined the skill of a great captain with redoubtable valour. During the battle, it is said, nine swords were broken in his hand. Other generals did not fight with less courage, fifty blows of sword and spear mark the body of Jafar.

Khalid has brought home the cherished corpses of the brave generals who preceded him,

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

—Zaid, Jafar and Abdullah. The Prophet is in tears; Medina is in mourning for the loss of her brave sons. The people flock to see them in the repose of death, covered with gashes, cheerfully had for honour and Islam. The Prophet is almost inconsolable, for Zaid and Jafar have been for many long years among the nearest in his affections. He takes the little son of Jafar in his arms and embraces him tenderly, covering him with his tears. He is also unable to control his grief when the daughter of Zaid comes to him.

A friend seeing him in this state says, "O Prophet, why should you cry like this?"

"These are," replies Muhammad, "the tears of one friend for another."

The city accords the brave martyrs a funeral worthy of their sacrifice. The bodies are taken through the town in procession, with a vast concourse of Muslims in attendance. All the leaders of the city are present. The Prophet and the congregation offer prayers for the peace of their souls and, tenderly, the bodies are lowered into graves made by loving hands.

[6]

Peace reigns in Medina, the Arabs are embracing Islam by tribes, the pride of the

CONQUEROR

Jews has been lowered, there is no immediate danger from the legions of the Greeks or an invasion by the Persians. The month of Al Kadr has also arrived. Under the fourth article of the Treaty of Hudaibiya, Muslims are now entitled to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. The trees bear March blossoms and cool breezes caress the brow. A numerous assemblage accompanies the Prophet; and thus, at the end of the seventh year of the flight, is fulfilled the prophecy: "You shall most certainly enter the sacred mosque, if Allah pleases, in security, some having their heads shaved, and others their hair cut. And you shall not fear." The Faithful carry with them no more than the swords permitted under the treaty, and shepherd, into the gates of Mecca, the animals marked for slaughter.

Mecca is deserted. Its inhabitants, rich and poor, have evacuated their houses; for three days they have pitched camps on the neighbouring hills. Here they cluster on points of vantage to watch the movements of the Prophet and his followers. It is a quaint sight with moments of strange emotions. There in the crowd below, they see the man they once thought crazy, then outlawed, upon whose head they set a price;

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

they recognise many friends and once dear relations. It is not long ago, only six or seven years,—near enough in time for the memory to recall familiar scenes—when they saw Muhammad preaching in the streets, the little band of followers, who hung upon his words, the larger crowds who mocked his promises and laughed at his warnings. What changes have been wrought in the space of seven short years? Muhammad, the outlaw, is now the most powerful of the chieftains of Arabia. His oppressors—his own kith and kin—the Quraish have fallen from their pedestals of pomp and circumstance, their armies have been scattered, their caravans are dependant upon the good sense of Muslim tribes, the elect of their race are one by one taking the paths that lead to Medina.

In Muslim minds too, there are feelings of strange emotion. Many are revisiting the home of their childhood, after long years in exile. The faith, which they had in their God and their Prophet, has not been in vain. Some are crying, but these are tears of joy, when the heart cannot hold its exaltation. Some are visiting the sacred city for the first time; they have heard of the Temple of Abraham, the precious Stone, the multitude of idols that Muham-

CONQUEROR

mad despised. Not a few mark the event as a happy culmination of their labours and privations.

All eyes are fixed upon the central figure on the stage. His smallest movements are observed. Everything is interesting to them; everything is important to him. He proceeds to the Temple, reverently kisses the Black Stone, accomplishes the sacred circuits, paces the Hills of Safa and Merva, and offers prayers at the door of the Sanctuary of Abraham.

The Muslim pilgrims stay just three days; and, having fulfilled the ceremonies prescribed for the pilgrimage, in due regard for the terms of the Treaty, quit Mecca on the fourth day. There was really no necessity for the Quraish to evacuate Mecca, for there were no designs upon the city in the minds of the Prophet or his followers. Muhammad, in the days of his youth, was *Al Amin*—Muhammad the trusty. Though time has wrought many changes, it has made no difference in his spoken or written word. He is still *Al Amin*—Muhammad the trustworthy.

[7]

But can the same be said of his enemies? The perfidy of the Jews has already been com-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

mented upon. The Quraish too show that they are not oppressed by scruples. Shortly after the Prophet has left Mecca, they appear in their true colours, attacking the Banu Bakr, a tribe in alliance with the Prophet, massacring a number of their people and laying waste their fields. This is clearly a breach of the truce established under the Treaty of Hudaibiya which applies equally to tribes in alliance with either party. The unfortunate victims of the Quraish attack demand that the wrong upon them should be avenged by the Muslim power in terms of the treaty of friendship between them and Medina.

There are, of course, at this moment, some critics of Islam, who maintain that the Prophet has himself sought the opportunity to dissolve the Treaty of Hudaibiya, which has never been popular in Muslim circles. There are others who impute designs of an imperial character,—that Mecca is the bare spot in the flank of his dominions, and, until Mecca has been conquered, Islam can never enjoy an established credit. Whether the Prophet has, at any time, looked covetously upon Mecca, or whether Mecca will complete his authority in Arabia and add immeasurably to his stature as a king, are both immaterial to the real question at issue. If Muhammad

CONQUEROR

had designs upon the sacred city, no more favourable opportunity could be forthcoming, than when he was within the precincts of the city itself, an evacuated and defenceless city. But he came out as he went in, and not a brick of Mecca was the worse thereby. If, indeed, he has designs upon Mecca, the Quraish have themselves to thank for the opportunity: They have violated a Treaty which was all in their favour. The breach having been established, each party is, of course, free to pursue the sanction of its arms.

The Quraish realise—but too late—that in attacking the Banu Bakr, they have committed a grievous blunder. They are anxious to avoid the wrath of the Prophet. For this purpose, they depute Abu Sufyan to Medina with power to accept any terms in satisfaction. Abu Sufyan, on arrival at capital of Islam, goes first to the house of his daughter Umm Habiba, who has recently been espoused by the Prophet. He begs of her to intercede with the great man. With tears in his eyes, says the aged Abu Sufyan: "Habiba, do you prefer this bed to your father?"

Habiba has all the regards of a daughter for a father, but, as one of the early converts to Islam, shared with her first husband all the per-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

secutions meted out by the Quraish. She was also one of the fugitives to Abyssinia. Abu Sufyan, therefore, can get scant sympathy in this quarter: "This bed belongs to the Apostle of God," she replies coldly, "and you dear father, are an idolater."

Cursing, Abu Sufyan repairs to Abu Bakr and Ali. Here too his solicitations meet with no success. He goes direct to the Prophet, but is not able to get a word from him upon the subject.

Abu Sufyan returns to Mecca disheartened, and recounts the meeting with his daughter, the behaviour of Abu Bakr and Ali, and the tell-tale silence of the Prophet.

In the course of secret mobilisations at Medina, Hatel-ibn Batia is brought before the Prophet, on a charge of communicating information to the enemy. A letter addressed by Hatel has been intercepted. The letter reads: "Meccans, Beware! The Apostle of God is preparing to attack you. Hasten in your defences." The culprit swears that his sole motive in writing was to safeguard his wife and children, who are stranded in Mecca. If the Meccans know that he is friendly to them, they would treat his family well. Umar wants to cut his head forth-

CONQUEROR

with: "Prophet, Hatel is a liar and a hypocrite. He is a spy. Let me sever his head."

"Umar," says the Prophet sternly, "spare the blood of my companions. Hatel fought with us at Badr." And turning to the prisoner, "Go, you are forgiven."

While Meccans are still groping in indecision, ten thousand watch-fires suddenly blaze on the neighbouring hills, heralding the arrival of the Muslim host.

Abu Sufyan hastens out to reconnoitre, but is unfortunate to meet the Prophet's uncle Abbas.

"Is it Al Abbas?" enquires Abu Sufyan.

"Even so."

"What do I see behind you?"

"Muhammad the Apostle, who visits you along with ten thousand companions."

"What do you advise that we should do?"

"Surrender, or you are done for."

Abu Sufyan accompanies Abbas to the Muslim camp. Umar, who is in charge of the camp, recognises the chief of the idolaters.

"God be praised," says the fiery Umar, "what do I see? You Abu Sufyan in our midst, without pact or treaty?" And he snarls menacingly: "Is it not time to recognise that

there is one God?"

"I do not doubt it."

"And that Muhammad is His Apostle?"

"Forgive my sincerity; up to the present, I have thought differently."

"Then," says the irate Muslim, "I will put an end to your thinking," and, so saying, flashes a great blade over Abu Sufyan's head.

The Prophet makes a timely appearance—timely for Abu Sufyan's head.

Says Abbas, "Now Abu Sufyan, render homage to truth and to the Apostle of God."

And thus does Abu Sufyan pass into the ranks of Islam.

The leader of the Quraish is all admiration for the excellent discipline and bearing of the Muslim army. "By God," says he to Abbas, when he has been shown over the camp, "the kingdom of your nephew has indeed grown great. I doubt if there is any one now who can withstand him."

Abu Sufyan hastens back to his people to advise them to make peaceful submission to the Conqueror of the Arabs.

At the appointed time, in the early dawn, the Muslim army moves forward to occupy the city. It is in battle formation, ready for any

CONQUEROR

eventuality. Zubair has orders to gain an entrance by the heights overlooking the Kada route into Mecca. Sa'd is directed to guard the ravines that cross the road to Koadah. Ali, with the cavalry, has to occupy Mount Hajoun. Khalid, with the general body of troops, is ordered to proceed to the walls of the city. The Prophet takes charge of the rear, holding himself in readiness wherever he may be needed. All his generals have instructions not to fight unless attacked by the enemy. Zubair, encountering no opposition, arrives at the gates of the city without difficulty. But Khalid meets with resistance. Several Quraish battalions dispute his passage, releasing a cloud of arrows upon the advancing Muslims. Khalid gives the order for attack, and hurls himself and his men into the Quraish infantry. The Prophet, seeing the fight from the Medinite rear, enquires about the trouble: "Heaven, What do I see? Have I not forbidden this?" He is informed that the enemy has attacked Khalid and that the battle is in self-defence. The Prophet hastens a messenger to his general to spare bloodshed. But the fight is short and the invincible Khalid arrives victorious at the walls of Mecca.

By sunrise all the gates of the city are in

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

possession of the Muslim army, which holds itself in readiness for the triumphant entry of its Generalissimo. The sky is clear and cloudless. The sun rises over the hills flooding the scene in radiance. Ten thousand spears flash like so many streaks of lightning. Banners flutter gaily in the breeze. The streets are thronged with a curious multitude. There is the sound of music, the throbbing of triumphant drums. And thus, a while later, in a long procession, headed in front and guarded behind with fierce warriors, Muhammad makes his victorious entry into Mecca, the city of his birth, and the sacred centre of his race. Before him rides Ali, proudly carrying the standard of Islam; to his right is his faithful friend and companion, Abu Bakr; to his left Uthman. Immediately behind the Prophet rides Uthama, son of Zaid.

The procession goes straight to the Temple. As it passes through the long tortuous streets, the Prophet's mind wanders back to the days when he was but one of the multitude, friendless and unknown. The years of misfortune, toil, disappointment and persecution seem now but dreams of the long-forgotten yesterdays. In the hour of his triumph, he feels the absence of many loved companions, who have fallen by the

CONQUEROR

roadsides of time. Khadija? What would Khadija say if she were living to-day? Zaid and Jafar, and a hundred other fond friendships that made the hours of disappointment seem short, and sacrifices that paved the route to victory.

As Muhammad sees the courtyard of the ancient Ka'ba he calls a halt, and, lifting his hands to the heavens, in a loud voice, recites the verses of the Koran entitled *Al Fateh*: "*Bismilla birrahma nirrahim*. Surely We have given you a clear victory. Allah's are the hosts of the Heavens and of the Earth, and Allah is knowing and wise. Allah promised you many acquisitions, which you will take, and others which you have not yet been able to achieve. Allah encompassed your enemies for Allah has power over all things."

Standing there at the entrance of the shrine, the central star of a brilliant constellation, his head tied with a simple black turban, and a mantle of the same colour carelessly thrown about his shoulder, he still looks more like the homely preacher of crazy doctrines than the Conqueror of Arabia.

His first task is to break the three hundred gods, who have usurped Allah's place in the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Temple, and to purge the shrine of its profanities. He tears the portraits of women from the walls, and wrecks the pictorial tablets of Abraham and Ishmael. With a stick in hand he goes up to the idol Hobal, looks Hobal in the face, Hobal winces, and is soon reduced to debris. His companions shatter Hobal's co-gods. This done, the Prophet makes the circuits of the Temple and reverently touches the angle of the precious Black Stone. Having said his prayers, and offered his gratitude to the great mercy of Allah, in the magnificent conclusion of his efforts, he goes to the wells of Zamzam and quenches his thirst from their waters.

After these several formalities, he addresses a vast multitude in the verses of the Koran: "There is only one God. He has fulfilled His promises and brought succour to His worshippers. He alone has confounded the enemy and defeated its battalions. He gave me authority over you in order to make you abjure idolatry. You shall no longer accord honour to insensible stones; you shall no longer practise sacrilegious cults."

A conquest by might of arms is generally assumed to carry with it the right to reduce the conquered to bondage, to forfeit their property,

CONQUEROR

and to put to death important captives. The Quraish have no extenuating circumstances to commend them to Muhammad's indulgence.

"What have you to say as to how I should treat you?" he asks the Quraish gravely.

"As the generous brother that you are," they reply with one voice.

"So be it," he says, "I will not reproach you to-day. You are free for God has forgiven you."

In the quiet of the evening, Umar asks the Prophet as to why he has been so generous with the Quraish, considering all that they have done against him and against Islam.

"Because," he tells Umar, "there is no reproof against them. And what is more," he adds earnestly, "they and their children, and their children's children, will be Muslims."

Muhammad has been generous and magnanimous on more occasions than it is easy to remember. But his too-ready forgiveness of the Quraish is an event unique in history. When it is known that the amnesty includes such persons as the passionate lady of Abu Sufyan's household, who chewed the lever of Hamza; Wahshi, the negro, who killed Hamza by a thrust in the back; Abu Sufyan who has intri-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

gued and led armies against Islam; Akrama son of Abu Jahal, who was one of the generals at Uhud and who was responsible for disputing Khalid's entry into Mecca in the morning; Abdullah the Prophet's scribe, who has defaced the sacred pages of the Koran; Kariba the dancer, who has mocked the Prophet in ribald turns of her art, the extent of Muhammad's magnanimity seems truly astounding.

[8]

The surrender of Mecca took place on Friday the twenty-first day of the month of Ramadan, in the ninth year of the *Hijra*, corresponding to 631 of the Christian era. For a month and a half, the Prophet stays in the city to organise the affairs of government and religion. During this time, he has restored to Uthman, the keys of the Ka'ba, which he renounced when he joined Al Islam. To Abbas, the faithful uncle of the Prophet, is consigned the custody of the sacred goblet, from which the pilgrims drink at the wells of Zamzam. For himself, the Prophet has been wont to take his seat upon the Hill of Safa, and there enact, day by day, a scene, the like of which the world has never seen and will not see again. Dressed in the

plain robes of the poorest of his race, seated on a bare rock, the centre of a vast admiring and devotional multitude, he receives the testimony to the one God and the truth of his message:

"Asb-badual-la-ilaba ill-Allah,

Asb-baduanna Mubammadur-rasul-Allah."

The tribes and the masses, who come to him, each in turn take the pledge that the men of Yathreb gave him on the Hill of Aqaba, namely to abjure all gods but the one God, and to avoid larceny, adultery, infanticide, and falsehood.

It will be remembered that, according to tradition, it was Ishmael who brought to Mecca the cult of the one God, and raised the sacred Ka'ba to His glory. For a long time the shrine was preserved in its purity. But when the votaries of the Ka'ba grew to such large numbers, that they could not be accommodated within the precincts of the Temple, some took with them stones from the shrine, which they set up in their colonies. These objects, at first, served as momentos of the origin of the religion of Ishmael. By degrees, however, the stones themselves became objects of veneration, and the real reasons that explained their presence were obliterated. In time some of these stones assumed shapes, crudely resembling the human

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

form or its generative organ. Gods and goddesses took birth, with bodies to feed, and appetites to be appeased. Corruption grew apace. Mecca itself became the centre of congregation for the tribal deities. For generations it thus continued to receive the homage of its neighbours. And until Muhammad raised his voice against paganism and idolatry, Mecca's authority as the centre of the religions of the Arabs was undisputed.

The idols of the Ka'ba having been thrown out, the Prophet sends messengers to all part of Arabia, inviting the people to do the same by their gods. But it is made clear to these emissaries that their duty is limited to persuasion, and must, on no account, extend to coercive measures. They are to be men of peace,—the message, that they are charged to deliver, is that of *Islam*, which signifies peace. Their greetings to mankind will summarise their mission: *Assalam-o-alaikum*—or, Peace be with you.

But not all the messengers of the Prophet command his patience with opposition, or possess his tolerance for the incredulous. Khalid's mind, for one, is not cast in the mould of compromise. Before his conversion to Islam, his hate of the Muslim was as definite as his hate of the

CONQUEROR

pagan now. In Khalid's world there is no room for infidels. He, accordingly, preaches to the Jadimites, with the Koran in one hand, and his sword in the other. The Jadimites are not convinced. So Khalid gives them the option of battle, which they accept. They muster their forces and give fight. But Khalid defeats them easily, slaying some and taking the rest into captivity. He proposes to cut their heads, when it is suggested that the matter be deferred until the Prophet is consulted. When the Prophet hears of Khalid's missionary enthusiasm, he recalls him at once, and sends Ali to pay compensation to the Jadimites for the loss of life, and expresses horror at Khalid's intolerance. "Lord," he says, "I am innocent of Khalid's crime."

[9]

As days go by, more and more tribes pronounce their conversion to the one God and the Message through Muhammad the Prophet. Al Islam seems now to have reached perfection. Muhammad, its principal exponent, is at the height of his power. All eyes are upon him. Islam is the centre of discussion.

At this important juncture in the history of Islam, it is interesting to take a near view

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

of the creed and its Prophet. Is Islam in reality a faith of peace for humanity at large? Reasons are forthcoming in support of this proposition.

Firstly, Islam may boast of a characteristic peculiar to itself, namely that, in order to be a good Muslim, it is not necessary to reject the truth or the veracity of other religions revealed to the world before the Koran. The Koran does not presume to set out new ideas, not already known to mankind. Its mission is to preach the truth of the oneness of God and the unity of His creation, in its simple naked beauty. It is a Book of "pure pages, wherein are all the Scriptures."

Secondly, Islam is a religion easy of comprehension. The child or the man of wisdom may equally delight in its simplicity. It is not burdened with dogma contrary to logic or reason. There are no far-fetched theories of the transmigration of the dead; there are no miracles, which abuse science and common understanding. There is no need for heart and head to tread different paths. A Muslim can avow his faith without insulting his intelligence. The main principles of Islam are summarised in a verse of the sura *Al Baqrah*, five principles being indicated,—three of belief and two of practice.

A Muslim is required to believe in the one God, in the truth as revealed in the Koran and the scriptures that have preceded it. In the practical issues, a Muslim is enjoined to prayer and to charity in its widest sense. To be a good Muslim, the practical is as important as the theoretical, mere belief being insufficient. Over and over again the Koran lays emphasis upon those who believe *and* do good.

Thirdly, parochialism, or any notion of the favoured nation or the chosen people, has no place in the teachings of Islam. The doctrine of a common humanity is the corollary upon the doctrine of the one God: "O Men! We have created you all of the male and female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other;" "There is not a people but a warner has gone among them." The salvation and the mercy of God are not confined to the members of any creed: "Call upon me and I will answer you;" "My mercy encompasses all things;" "We will on the day of judgment set up a just balance, so that no soul shall have the least grievance for injustice." There is no honour by birth, or disgrace in colour, race or language. There is but one criterion of greatness open to all alike: "Surely the noblest among you in the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

eyes of God is one who is most mindful of his duty." The Prophet has also, in a sermon, made it clear that "if a negro slave is appointed to rule over you, hear him and obey him." From the examples set by the Prophet and his companions, and the teachings of the former, the above dicta are not intended to be mere theories, but to be translated into the actual incidents of daily life.

Fourthly, Islam establishes a brotherhood among all Muslims. This subject has already been referred to several times. The rule of brotherhood among Muslims was enjoined by the Prophet when he said: "No one among you is a believer in God, unless he loves his brother as he loves himself."

Fifthly, Islam is a religion of peace and toleration. The dominant feature of Islam, as its very name implies, is the making of peace. A Muslim is one who has made his peace with God and man. Peace with God implies the complete submission to His will, and obedience to the laws of creation. Peace with mankind implies the doing of good to one's fellow creatures: "Yea, whoever submits himself to Allah and is the doer of good to others, he shall have his reward."

Sixthly, Islam is not merely the elaboration

of a theory, it is a code of practical ethics and a guide to daily life. Duty to God has a place beside duty to man, oneself, one's fellow creatures and the other sex. The payment of *zakat*, the active defence of the faith, the sanctity of contract, the avoidance of usury, wine and unclean food, fair dealings with women, slaves and orphans. These are some of the positive mandates of Islam. The behest that the noblest is the one who is most mindful of his duty is equally applicable in this aspect of Islam. And therefore,

Seventhly, the reward of Islam is based on conduct not upon mere belief.

Eighthly, Islam eradicates various injustices of a social nature. Thus the right of a slave to gain his freedom is fully recognised. And, not merely may he earn his liberty, he may lead an army, rule over a state and espouse the best blue-blooded maiden in the kingdom. In Islam woman obtains her right to property and inheritance. Her relationship in matrimony is placed upon an equitable basis. She is protected against whim and injustice; in certain circumstances, she may claim separation and divorce. Islam also introduces a system of poor relief which is both voluntary, as well as a duty. It is also definite

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

in measure. It is ample enough to maintain the poor, it is small enough, in proportion to income, not to hamper incentive and enterprise.

Ninthly, Islam is a religion, which takes account of human nature; that man is not monogamous by instinct, that husband and wife are apt to disagree, that in order to be a good man, it is not necessary to abjure the fineries of life, to starve, to deform the body, to be loyal to a union in which love has ceased to exist, or to resist normal appetites in food and flesh. In Islam it is not necessary to be meek in order to inherit the Earth, nor to be a child to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. You are not required to offer your enemy the other cheek, when every limb of your body is aching to hit back; or to obey unjust laws and suffer the infamy of tyrants.

Tenthly and lastly, Islam is the first religion of the world to place the acquisition and cultivation of knowledge before the worship of God. In Islam, therefore, religion and science are correlated. Science is progressive, and hence just as Islam is a religion for all humanity, it is also a religion for all time. In the eyes of the Prophet to explore the realms of nature and the hidden corners of the universe is not merely a service in the cause of humanity, it is a service in

the glorification of God. Says he: "He, who leaves home in the search of knowledge, walks in the path of God," and again, "It is incumbent on every one, male or female to acquire knowledge." "The ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr." "Acquire knowledge, it will enable you to distinguish right and wrong, it will light the way to heaven, it will be your friend in the desert, your society in solitude, your companion in loneliness, your guide to happiness, the sustainer of your misery, the ornament among your friends, and the armour against your enemies."

And thus the Koran has become, in the Islamic world, not merely a splendid literary achievement, it has also become a compendium of moral and social laws. Its inspiration is the only miracle to which Muhammad the Prophet lays claim. It is the breadth of God in the flickering embers of human life.

Of all the great teachers that the world has hitherto seen, Muhammad is the only one who can lay a claim to have had, not only the opportunity of expounding theories, but also, the opportunity of testing these theories in the practice. Poor Jesus Christ expressed the noblest sentiments on charity and forgiveness;—

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

thus upon the Cross, persecuted and crucified, he forgave his enemies: "They know not what they do." But it was never in Christ's good fortune to have his enemies reduced to impotence before him. Mani, Zoroaster and Buddha had much the same luck as Jesus Christ, and it was not until their death, that any large body of people attempted to understand or to follow their preachings. Islam, in distinction, has grown from the crystals to the finished product, in the life-time of its Prophet. Muhammad, in distinction to other prophets before him, has passed through all the phases of life, from orphan to king, from idealist to the man of the world. His amazing career has embraced the positions of a son, a father, a husband, and a neighbour, a tradesman, a preacher, a persecuted fugitive, a friend, a warrior, a general, a conqueror, a judge, an administrator, a giver of laws, a statesman and now an emperor. We need not confine our estimate of him to the sublimity of his teachings or the loftiness of his sentiments; we can judge him by his actions, we can set him in the balance against his deeds.

The multitudes, who have accepted the faith at his hands on Mount Safa, have not all been impressed with the brilliance of his military

CONQUEROR

achievements. An Arab knows too well of the caprice and fickleness of fortune to put any great value upon her present smile. They have been much more impressed by the man, who has sat before them, in the plain garb of a common Bedouin, who, by his talk and deeds, has convinced them that he is not intoxicated with victory, who, in triumph and defeat, looks up to his God, in the same spirit of humility, and with the same devotion.

The Meccans knew their Muhammad in the days of his persecution. Of the days of his glory at Medina they have had only reports by hearsay. Now, while he has been in their midst, preaching to them, putting the affairs of state into order, coming into contact with them, being called upon to do various acts of a private and public nature, they have been able to see their great Prophet-King at close quarters.

What sort of man do they find?

A rather shy man, for when people want to read poems in his praise, he appears uncomfortable. A man fair in dealings,—he buys goods and pays the market price; when he cannot afford to pay, he avoids making purchases; if he is forced to borrow, he is not content until he has repaid his debts. Any distinction savouring of

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

birth or of fortune is repulsive to him. The Muzdalafa, which has been a place reserved for the Quraish in the pilgrimage, has been thrown open to every one alike: whoever now reaches the place first, has prior claim upon it. They find him a man without the pride of power or position; he accepts alike the invitations of free men and slaves; he visits the sick, accompanies a funeral procession, whenever he meets one; he goes among his people as an ordinary man, consoling the afflicted, lending a hand wherever needed, giving his advice where sought. His food and living is of the plainest. He offers and receives hospitality. He is a magnificent horseman, he rides a camel, but is not ashamed to walk. He is no crank; he enjoys a joke, and laughs heartily. In times of leisure, he plays with children and runs races with his friends. He enjoys the beauty of flowers and the fragrance of perfume. Though his living is simple, he has not perverted his nature to the abnegation of the good things of life; he gives love for love, he is a warmhearted friend, a tender husband, and a fair master. He is an exemplary ruler; he is charitable; the indigent and unfortunate have a special corner in his heart. Like Christ, he dearly loves little children. He has an open

CONQUEROR

mind; he likes debates; he admires good qualities in others. He is ready to admit a fault or an error; he is not ashamed of a just rebuke, whether by God or by a man. His most estimable quality is that in his own estimation he is no more than a mere man.

CHAPTER VII

MAN

While tribe upon tribe come to Mecca to offer alliance, subordination, or to accept the new faith, news is brought that the Hawazin and the Thaqif have formed a powerful opposition and are mobilising against the Prophet. Their plan is to overwhelm Mecca before the Muslim army is ready to meet an attack.

Swiftly the Muslim leader decides to march out, and, while the enemy is still in the process of mobilisation, he is on his way against them at the head of twelve thousand troops,—ten thousand that accompanied him from Medina and two thousand recruited locally. It is one of the biggest armies that has hitherto assembled in Arabia under a single leader. It is so brave and magnificent a sight, that one of the Prophet's captains cannot contain himself from saying: "It is impossible that such a splendid army as ours could ever be defeated." For this show of vanity he is sharply rebuked by the Prophet.

The Prophet takes up a position at Hunain, in a valley about a day's march from Mecca. On either side are great mountains, bearing aloft into the blue; ahead lies Autas, where, at day-break, he hopes to surprise the enemy. But night turns the stratagem to his disadvantage. Malik, the leader of the Hawazin, profiting by the darkness, sets one-half of his army at the mouth of the gorge, and sends the other half to close the rear. Dawn finds the Muslim army set between the jaws of a vice. Numbers of the Prophet's men lose courage, and hasten for shelter into neighbouring valleys. The rest, however, put up a half-hearted fight. The battle exposes the Prophet to the greatest peril of his life, and comes within an ace of snatching in a day the fruit of twenty years hard work.

The Muslim army is forced disadvantageously to fight on two fronts. Long and sanguine is the battle, and only after many vicissitudes, when victory seems to flirt with pagan and Muslim alike, does evening see a great rally in the Muslim ranks and the enemy in flight.

The Prophet follows the defeated Malik to Ta'if where the Hawazin take shelter. The Muslim army lays siege to the town, which surrenders after a grim struggle. The spoils taken in

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

this expedition are immense—six thousand captives, forty thousand head of sheep and goat, four thousand ounces of silver, and twenty-four thousand camel. The Hawazin, of course, do not delay in seeking the most favourable terms possible. In a body they embrace Islam and pray for the return of their goods and prisoners.

“My soldiers,” says the Prophet, “will never agree to your demand in its entirety. Choose one or the other.”

After ten days' deliberation, the Hawazin choose their prisoners, and six thousand men, women and children are returned to them. To Malik, the enemy leader, the Prophet offers, in appreciation for his having become a Muslim, a personal gift of a hundred camel. The Prophet also restores to him all his personal property. To the Hawazin, as gesture of his good will, he returns one-fifth of the booty, the share that should fall to the public treasury. The Prophet, having appointed Malik as his governor, returns to Mecca to offer thanks for his victory.

An incident, arising out of the distribution of the spoil taken in this expedition, deserves to be recorded in these pages. After the booty was divided, it was found that a larger share fell to the lot of the newly converted Meccans, than to

the old Medinite followers. In consequence, strained relations ensued between the troops from Medina and the troops recruited in Mecca. When the Prophet heard of the trouble, he summoned an assembly of the whole army and addressed them as follows: "O Ansar, I have heard that you are discontented with your share of the booty. I want you to remember that, when I came to you, you were wandering in darkness, and it was Allah who set you on the right path. You were suffering and He made you happy; you were at enmity with yourselves, He filled your hearts with brotherly love and concord. Is that not so?"

"Prophet of Allah, that is so," replied the leader of the Ansar on behalf of his party.

"No, that is not all, O Ansar. You might very well have replied to me, and answered quite truly—for I should have promptly testified to the truth,—that it was I who came to you, having been rejected by my people as an impostor, and you believed in me; that I came to you as a helpless fugitive, and you assisted me; I was poor and an outcaste, you gave me an asylum; comfortless, you solaced me. Ansar, why do you let the things of the world disturb the equanimity of your minds? It is not

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

enough that you have me to go back with you? By the Master of the Universe, I swear to you that I will never desert you. If all mankind, O Ansar, went one way, and you went another, I would go with you."

The assembly was profoundly moved: "Yea," said they in accord, "Prophet, we are content that you are to accompany us. We will not quarrel any more about the booty."

Thus comes to an end the eighth glorious year of the *Hijra*. It has been glorious in more particulars than one. It has seen the conquest of Mecca, the defeat of the Greek army, the victory of Hunain and Autas, and the perfection of Al Islam. In Muhammad's personal life too, it has been a happy one. Maryam, the young Copt girl sent to him by Mokaukas of Egypt, has presented him with a boy, who has been named Ibrahim. The occasion has been one of great rejoicings in his household, for the Prophet's longing to have a son has been known. Since Khadija's death he has married several wives. Not that he needed to, for, in Ayesha and Hafsa, he had two most comely women. Some of these marriages were necessitated by political expediency, thus the alliance with Safiyya to please the Jews, Maimuna to please the Quraish and

Juwairiya to gratify the Banu Mustaliq. His other marriages were to befriend the widows of the most deserving of his followers,—Umm Habiba, Sauda, and Hafsa, being in this category. His union with Maryam, the fair lotus from the Nile, was neither inspired by political expediency nor by emotions of chivalry. The reason was more commonplace. Muhammad the man wanted a son in his likeness. It was a want that he shared equally with the mightiest emperor as with the poorest of his subjects. Ibrahim's birth has, therefore, given him pleasure, perhaps equal to the conquest of Mecca, or the rout of the Byzantine legions.

[2]

The dawn of the tenth year sees delegations from distant places,—Yemen, Bahrein and towns on the borders of Syria and Persia—pour into Medina. Some seek Islam, other alliance. The sun of Islam is now in its noonday meridian, glorious in a cloudless sky. Gone are the hanging mists of morning, and the doubts of night. The age of barbarism, blood feuds, pagan manners and corrupt beliefs, has given place to an era of enlightenment, knowledge, understanding and humanity. To Medina, therefore, flock embassies from North, South and

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

East, to render homage to Islam and its Prophet.

Some return with parchments, inscribed with their duties and rights as allies of the Muslim Power, others take home with them presents from the head of Islam; yet others are accompanied by teachers to instruct their people in the new Faith; a great many go back, having discarded their beliefs with the clothes of the journey, and return in new clothes for the way and new raiments for their souls.

Among these delegations are ambassadors from the Banu Thaqif to inform the Prophet that they will accept Islam, if he will exempt them from prayers, and leave their idol Lat, to abide with them for three years more.

The uncompromising Umar, who is a witness to this request, is unable to contain his wrath. He reads into it an attempt to corrupt the heart of the Prophet. Says Umar, "May you burn in the fires of Hell."

"We speak to Muhammad, not to you," answers the Thaqif ambassador dryly.

"Good," says the Prophet, "I will not hear of your proposition. You can have your choice of Islam or Lat."

The Thaqif are thunderstruck.

"At least let him be for six months. We ask for just six months, for Lat."

"No."

"Then just for a month."

"No, not even for a single hour."

The ambassadors then return to their city, accompanied by a small detachment of Muslim soldiers, who reduce Lat to pieces.

While the message of Islam is thus spreading far and wide, the Prophet has directed that the *Suras* of the Koran should be arranged. Several persons have committed the whole text to memory, so that, whatever be the fate of the manuscripts, the Koran can never be lost. These measures assure that, for all time, the text of the Koran will be maintained in its original purity, and not a single line, inflection or punctuation will be misplaced. As a matter of fact, from the earliest years of the revelations, the Prophet has taken precautions that the precious text should be reduced to writing. His practice has been to dictate the passages, as soon as revealed. Most of the revelations were first written out by Zaid-ibn Sabit; but since his death, this duty has been performed by various persons,—Abu Bakr, Umar, Ali, Abdullah-ibn

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Sa'd, Zubair and Khalid have shared this privilege. To these scribes, the Prophet has given clear instructions that they are not to put into writing any matter, as emanating from him, except the Koran, so that there may be no confusion between the divine text and his personal observations, made on several occasions.

And thus is being set up the basis of the Islamic Law, the *Shariah*,—which has a wider application than most secular law, as it is intended to regulate all aspects of life—duty to God, duty to one's neighbour, and to oneself. The *Shariah* is, therefore, in substance a code of duties, ethical, religious and legal; it governs not only the private life of the Muslim, but also, determines the laws of inheritance, marriage and divorce, as well as certain branches of the general criminal law. The law of Islam, like the doctrine and practice of the religion itself, is based primarily upon the word of God as contained in the divinely inspired pages of the Koran; and secondly, upon the traditions established by the Prophet (the *Hadis*), which are constituted by his sayings and his manner of life (*Sunna*). The latter are considered as a valuable adjunct to the precepts of the Koran, for in the eyes of the people, Muhammad rules over

them as an inspired Prophet. Whenever present, he leads in the public prayers; he is a judge as well as the supreme court of appeal; the army and the public administration are also in his hands. The development of the Islamic law begins, therefore, with the Prophet sitting as a judge in Medina. He is guided, in the first instance, by the Koran, and where the latter is silent, then upon his own judgment. His deputies, who are called upon to exercise the judicial or administrative functions delegated to them, have first to consult the Koran, then to apply any known decision of the Prophet in a similar case; if they are unable to find any precedent or direction, then it is permissible to apply their own reason and to decide the question justly to the best of their ability. This latter privilege, has been expressly recognised by the Prophet. Thus Muad, on being appointed Governor to Yemen, was asked by the Prophet as to the law he would administer to the people in his charge. Muad replied: "By the law of the Koran."

"But if you do not find any direction in the Holy Book?"

"Then," said Muad, "I will act according to the *Sunna* of the Prophet."

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

"But if you do not find any precedent in the *Sunna*?"

"Then I would exercise my judgment."

"Praise be to God," said the Prophet, raising his hands, "Who guides the messenger of His Apostle as it pleases Him."

This incident is clearly in consonance with the teachings of the Koran itself, where the exercise of reason has found applause in many passages, which, in turn, lay the foundations of a wise and learned system of jurisprudence. Incidentally, it may be noted that the law of Islam recognises no exceptions: it is binding upon all Muslims, the meanest and the most exalted alike.

As the territorial limits of Islam extend, it becomes impossible for the Prophet to personally administer all the affairs of the empire. Certain duties must therefore be delegated to representatives authorised by him. Even when the dominion of Islam was confined to the City of Medina, on such occasions as the expedition to Badr or the campaign against the Jews of Khaibar, Medina's administration had to be entrusted to a deputy. Now that long distances divide the frontiers of Islam, one observes the evolution of an institution of *Divans*, or go-

vernment bureaus, created to regulate and administer the system of taxation and the revenues of the state. The sources of income are the *zakat*, or the compulsory tithe, paid by every Muslim for the charitable functions of the state, the *jizya* or the poll tax, the *kharaj* or land tax on non-Muslims, and the fifth share of the booty taken in war.

The expansion of Islam, also, calls for devolution in other duties, hitherto performed by the Prophet. When, therefore, it becomes impossible for the Prophet to lead personally in congregational prayers, he delegates these functions to nominees, who are the *Imams* for the purpose. This office does not, however, supersede the privilege of any Muslim, better versed in the Koran than others present, to act as Imam of a congregation. The *Imam* not only leads in the prayer but also delivers the *khutba* or sermon, which according to a *hadis* of the Prophet, should be intelligible to the multitude, and not oppressively long.

The judicial administration is entrusted to persons learned in the law, whose judgment and impartiality may be depended upon. They are known as *Kadis*, and are charged with the administration of the estates of minors, the super-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

vision of *waqf* properties and the due execution of wills. *Kadis* are also empowered to try cases of apostasy, neglect of religious obligations, omission to pay taxes, theft, adultery, outrage and murder. They may inflict the prescribed punishments, or such as may be just, in the particular circumstances of the case.

[3]

The advancing years of the Prophet bring into prominence the question of a successor. The dominion of Islam has not been won by the Prophet for himself or the members of his family. The temporal state of Islam is the accident of history. In the lifetime of the Prophet, the headship of the religion, as well as of the state, is vested in one person—the Prophet himself. After his death, it will be necessary to appoint a *Khalifah* or successor, who would also hold the position of the *Amir-ul Mumineen*, or the Commander of the Faithful. But it is not quite clear whether such a successor would be appointed by God, the Prophet or the Muslim community. The general consensus of feelings is that, whereas the *Khalifah* will exercise the absolute powers now enjoyed by the Prophet, his election must rest with the Faithful. It is generally conceded, however, that the Prophet's

successor must come from the Quraish, to whom the Prophet belongs.

While peace reigns in Arabia,—most of the tribes having submitted to or come into alliance with the Muslim power,—a bigger and more formidable danger looms upon the horizon. Heraclius has returned home intoxicated by his victories over the Persians, and dreams of the conquest of Arabia, much as the Romans of the days of Augustus. The feudatories of the Byzantine Empire gather like hydra-headed monsters on the borders of Syria.

The news of preparations on a large scale are brought to the Prophet. No matter how much he may yearn for peace, it is no time to rest upon the laurels won. A serious peril must at once be met by a serious effort—not only by the head of the commonwealth and those charged with its administration, but by all Muslims alike. It is recognised, however, that the tactics, employed so successfully against the Arab tribes, will be of little avail against the well-organised Greeks. Against the latter speedy movement and deft manoeuvre will count for less than numbers in men and details of equipment. Big battles will no doubt be the order of the day. Muhammad and his generals, ac-

cordingly, set to work in real earnest to put into the field an army that could be an effective match for the Greek hosts.

Mobilisation is ordered in the month of Rajab, which has fallen in the middle of the summer, when Arabia is one of the hottest and most inhospitable regions on earth. The season is all against enthusiastic recruitment, and many are the waverers and deserters. To those who complain of the heat, the Prophet's answer is that the fires of Hell will be hotter. But all things considered, the response to his appeal is magnificent, not a few giving all they possess in the cause of Islam. Some are inspired by the hope of glory and new conquests.

When everything is ready, the Prophet entrusts the government of Medina to the care of the faithful Ali, and sets forth for the Syrian frontier with twenty thousand infantry and six thousand cavalry. Scorched in an ardent sun, stifled with dust, parched with thirst, hundreds fall by the way-side. Only the example of their leader, who marches at their head, without a murmur or complaint, helps to sustain the spirit of the army and fortify its determination.

At Tabuk, between Medina and Damascus, the great army comes to a halt to refresh itself

in cool springs and under green palms. Here the Prophet learns with great relief, that the Greeks are not ready for him; at any rate, they have no immediate plans upon his dominions. His forces are in sufficient numbers to add Damascus and a part of Syria to his dominions, but he has no Alexandrian dreams of empire. He is comparatively old and ill. The poison of Khair runs riot in his blood. His mission in life has been fulfilled, his dreams have been more than realised. He has fought battles all his life, he now yearns for peace and rest. He is, therefore, most agreeably surprised with the news received at Tabuk and at the prospect of being able to return home without delay.

Before departing homewards, however, he receives the submission of chieftains of towns neighbouring on the frontiers of Syria, as also the homage of a Christian prince. The last mentioned, upon hearing of the arrival of the Prophet at Tabuk, locked himself up in his fortress and challenged the Muslim army to attack him. The Prophet deputed Khalid, with four hundred horsemen, to accept the challenge. The Christians were completely outwitted, Khalid cleverly decoying them from their fortress and taking them in ambush. Khalid, having seized the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

fortress, returned to Tabuk with spoil of a thousand camel, eight hundred horse and four hundred captives. The impudent chief was, however, forgiven by the Prophet, and restored to his possessions, on an undertaking to be loyal and to pay tribute.

[4]

The return to Medina is marked by the completion of the *Sura* entitled *Al Barath*, parts of which were revealed in the ninth year of the flight, before the expedition of Tabuk. It is now published as a whole, and forms one of the most important landmarks in the history of Islam. It marks a definite parting of the ways between Islam and those who have, repeatedly, proved perfidious to their undertakings. It is the one and only chapter of the Koran which does not recite the formula "Bismilla-hirrahma-nirrahim."

The first verse provides the key to the *Sura*: "This is the declaration by Allah and His Apostle, towards the Idolaters, with whom you have made agreements." It will be remembered how, again and again, agreements of alliance have been transgressed. The Koran has hitherto advised to peace, even if unbelievers re-

pented after several preaches, but can this state of affairs be tolerated for ever? *Al Barath* now gives clear instructions to Muslims in the matter:

"Wait till the end of the sacred months, and then God and His Prophet declare that there is to be no more leniency towards Idolaters. [Say]: If you repent, so much the better for you, but if you do not, you will not be able to withstand the wrath of the Almighty. Let Idolaters know and beware of the chastisement. So when the sacred months have passed away, slay the Idolaters, wherever they may be found; take them captives, besiege their towns and ambush them whenever possible. For how can there be any treaty between you, for if they have the upper hand, they regard neither pact nor alliance? They satisfy you with their words, while their hearts team with dishonesty. Fight them! Allah will chastise them at your hands. He will lay them low and give you victory over them." It is, however, made clear in the text that this war, upon unbelievers, is, to be confined to those who have not observed their treaty obligations. This chapter also forbids the entry into mosques of others than believers; it proclaims that the efforts of the Jews and Christians against Islam are doomed to failure; it des-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

cribes the worldliness of their monks and priests; it reprimands those who hesitated and wavered in joining the expedition of Tabuk, and those who deserted. As a reward for those who tread in the paths of Allah and the Prophet, there is promised: "Gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them and best of all they will enjoy Allah's pleasure." The end of the chapter exhorts every Muslim community to contribute to the object of spreading the truth, which is the real object of Islam.

When Ali conveys this ultimatum of Islam to the perfidious tribes, their attitude is indicated in the following reply:

"O Ali! Tell your cousin Muhammad that we have thrown our agreements away; there is now no agreement between him and us, except to settle our disputes with spear and sword."

But this bravado takes them nowhere. The victory of Hunain and Autas has shattered the infidel power conclusively.

[5]

Muhammad, the Prophet, is now in the sixty-third year of his life, which coincides with the close of the tenth year of the *Hijra*. He feels his mission is complete. God has kept His

promises, providing victory both personal and of the Creed, that has been proclaimed through him. His age and his strength indicate that the end of the journey is now in sight. The sun is setting. It has painted the sky in the colours of evening,—purple, gold and rose—colours of triumph and tints of empire.

All around him he sees his creed the fashion of the hour. Kings, poets, warriors, tribes in their multitude profess the faith of the one God, taking the pledge that was once a secret between him and the men of Yathreb. No Prophet, within his life-time, has been accorded this reception by his contemporaries. The bitterness and disappointments of long years of struggle have more than been compensated for by the last ten glorious years of triumph.

But even as he felicitates himself on the mercy of God, it is ordained that he should suffer one more loss. Little Ibrahim, since his birth, has been the joy of his heart, the love in his eyes. He is the fragile link with posterity. Ibrahim is a boy who would be the pride of any household, fair, bonny, curly headed, with a smile that is net for those who come into contact with him. To Maryam, his mother, Ibrahim is not only her darling boy, but she sees in him

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

the likeness of his father, who is dear to her. Ibrahim has also endeared himself to the Faithful—men look at him in endearing admiration; women wish that all children were as sweet as he is.

But death snatches him from fond parents and a populace who adore him. Maryam is broken-hearted. Muhammad gives way to his grief. He carries little Ibrahim in his arms, so light and so tender, and gently lays him to rest beneath a green date palm. Tears are rolling down his eyes, as he smoothes the earth over the little grave with his own hands. "This eases the afflicted heart," he says, "it is a comfort to the living, even though it neither profits nor injures the dead."

The death of Ibrahim has broken whatever interest he had left in life. He sees his health rapidly declining. The twilight is fast closing in. Before night and eternal rest come, he wishes to make one more pilgrimage to Mecca, to offer his last sacrifices and to deliver his final message to his people. The news, that he is bound for Mecca, spreads like wild fire throughout Arabia; and a vast concourse of people congregate at Mecca—the largest assemblage of pilgrims that Mecca has ever seen. One hundred

and twenty-four thousand pilgrims is the computed number. Muhammad arrives on the fourth day of the month of Al Hajj, and performs the prescribed rites of the pilgrimage. Among the pilgrims are men in all stations and walks of life,—chieftains, warriors, men of letters, poets, teachers, tradesmen, weavers and household servants. There is no mark of distinction: it is a meeting of Muslims from all parts of the country, where all congregate as brethren, and where every heart is full of the ardour and love that Islam inspires.

On the completion of the pilgrimage, the Prophet, mounted upon a camel, delivers a sermon to his people. The occasion is a memorable one, and the field of Mina will long linger in the minds of those who witness it. It is a veritable sea of humanity—men, women and children of all ages. Most of those present are bronzed with the sun, many are handsome and good looking. All are eager, attentive and spell bound. The Prophet addresses the gathering in slow clear tones. As each sentence is completed, it is repeated aloud in various parts of the congregation, so that it reaches the remotest corners of the vast assembly. It is a sublime message that he delivers to his listeners,

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

a message that will be remembered and will form a tradition among the followers of Islam for all time. It breathes a spirit of generosity, it establishes fair dealings among men on a basis that is human and workable, it settles the brotherhood among Muslims from whithersoever they may hail, and puts the finishing touches to a social order, freer from perils of oppression and injustice than any society that the world has yet seen.

"O People! Listen to my words; for I do not know whether I shall ever be among you again. Remember that your lives and property are sacred and inviolable amongst one another for all time.

"The Lord has ordained that every man shall have his share of inheritance, and a will or testament prejudicial to his heirs is unlawful.

"O People! You have rights over your wives, as they have rights over you. It is incumbent upon them to honour their conjugal faith and not commit acts of impropriety, which if they do, you have authority to chastise them, yet not severely. If your wives refrain from impropriety and are faithful to you, clothe and feed them suitably. They are a trust from God in your hands.

"And feed your slaves too with such food as you yourselves eat, and clothe them with the stuff that you wear. If they commit a fault, which you are not inclined to forgive, then sell them, for they are all servants of the Lord and are not to be tormented.

"Listen, O People! Listen to what I have told you. *Fix this in your hearts that every Muslim is the brother of every other Muslim. You are all equal, enjoying equal rights and subject to the same obligations. You are members of a common brotherhood.* It is accordingly forbidden to you to take from your brother, save that which he gives you of his own free will."

And then raising his voice: "Lord! I have delivered Your message."

A sound like thunder echoes through the valley. A hundred thousand throats, in one accord acclaim: "Aye, Apostle of Allah! You indeed have."

And then go their respective ways the vast gathering of pilgrims, bearing with them the last will and testament of Muhammad, the Prophet of the Desert.

[6]

It is nearing the end of the month of Safar,

in the eleventh year of the *Hijra*. The Prophet has received the tidings of the perfection of Islam: "This day have I perfected for you your religion, and completed My favour on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion." At Mecca on the last pilgrimage, he was told: "When there comes the help of Allah and Victory, and when you see men entering the religion of Allah in companies, then render the praise of the Lord, and seek His mercy."

The Prophet has fallen ill; he knows it is his last illness. He would like to live to hear of the result of the expedition, which is proposed to be sent to Syria under Usama-ibn Zaid. The Greeks have killed a Muslim ambassador; and equally to avenge his death, as the honour of the commonwealth, must the expedition be undertaken.

The Prophet was taken ill at the house of his wife Zainab; and, when worse, moved to the house of Ayesha, where he lies in the throes of a mortal fever.

Lying with his head in the lap of the tender Ayesha, he blames the poison swallowed at Khaibar.

He attends the prayers of the mosque as

long as he can. When he can no longer move, he deposes Abu Bakr to lead the congregations. On the last day when he attended the mosque, he told the audience how ill he was, and that he may not be able to come again, if any one had any money owed to him, he should claim it now. A Jew rose and claimed three dirhams, which were paid.

The illness makes rapid progress. The whole of Medina is distracted for the life of its Prophet. Fatima sits beside his bed weeping bitterly. He consoles her affectionately. "Fatima", he pleads, "dry these tears." Fatima smiles through the mist, but her grief is all the more poignant for the solace which he gives her.

He calls his friends one by one, and talks to them assuringly. He feels he is drifting irresistibly towards the ocean. But as ever, he is without fear. Tranquilly, he discusses with his family the details of his funeral ceremonies.

Several companions, dear to him, sit round his bed. He sees brave men sobbing like little children and he cannot restrain his own tears. One of them asks: "Apostle of God, if we have the misfortune of losing you, who ought to lead the prayers for you."

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

"I was just going to tell you. When you have bathed me and wrapped me in new linen, and put my corpse upon the board, on which you will carry me, place it for a while here. The first person, who enters this room, may lead the prayers. But neither you, nor my family, shall mourn for me grievously, nor trouble my rest with your wailing."

Muhammad, thus, maintains to the end the role of a Prophet, to which he was called about twenty-three years ago. It is with a heart as stout as ever, that he awaits his end. He shows none of the normal weaknesses of a man, when confronted with death, nor does he, for a moment, lose any of the strength of character or will, that have been the dominant features of his career. In his last moments, he still proves himself one of those extraordinary men, who are born to change the face of the world and to enchain humanity to their chariots.

As Muhammad lies affectionately nursed by Ayesha, the pageant of his amazing career passes before his eyes. In fleeting moments, he sees himself the orphan boy, playing upon Abdul Muttalib's shoulders, going to the Ka'ba with his uncle Abu Talib and offering libations to the idols of the Temple. He sees himself a trader,

leading a camel for the wealthy Khadija across the sands of the desert; he finds himself married, with children running wildly about the house; he sees himself a dreamer cogitating upon the beliefs of the Greeks, the egoism of the Jews, and the bigotry of the Christian priesthood. How quickly fifteen years seem to go by now! He sees Arabia, as it was, at war with man and God, the terrifying spectacle of the first revelation, the warmth and sympathy from Khadija, the enthusiasm of little Ali, the conversion of Umar, the consternation among the Quraish, the offers of high office, persecution, outlawry and flight. His mind travels back to the chance meeting of the six men from Yathreb, the invitation to Medina, the Battle of Badr, and the slender threads, upon which the fate of Islam then hung, the desertion of the archers at Uhud, the victory of Azab, the Treaty of Hudaibiya, and Umar's dissatisfaction; the perfidy of the Jews, the execution of the Banu Quraiza; his marriages with Hafsa and Safiyya; the sudden change in the fortunes of Islam, the flocking of tribes and important persons to the fold of his religion, the conquest of Mecca, the spread of the Islamic dominions to the four corners of Arabia; the invitation to Heraclius and Mokaukas; the

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

gift of Maryam, Ibrahim; the field of Mina and the audience that listened spell bound.

And as he lies living, for the last time, the moments of his life, the multitudes too are summing up the achievements of Muhammad the Prophet. They remember the gods they worshipped and how he weaned them to a simple belief, offering no more than the meanest intelligence could comprehend, and around which all the beliefs of the world could rally—the idea of the one God, supreme over the entire universe, the Avenger of crime and Rewarder of virtue. The Koran revealed through him, they recognise as the perfection of their language, rich and melodious, full of the most magnificent imagery and idea, and the harmony of the nature—the cry of the animals, the murmur of fugitive waves, the sound of thunder and the sigh of the wind. The disgrace and obloquy, to which he was subjected for so long, now only serve to enhance him in the public esteem and to lend further credit to his perseverance and the faith in his mission. There are no two opinions as to his fortitude and his courage, for rejected by his own tribe—the Quraish, the Christians and the Jews, the concourse of clamour and hate deterred him not in the least from the path he

trod. His genius was contrived to surmount obstacles. For the first time in history, he establishes a practical order of brotherhood, replacing ancient feuds, by sacred bonds of union. He and his armies fought with only two possible alternatives, martyrdom and death. He established thereby, not merely, a temporal empire but also a more important empire in the hearts of his people. He could call for any sacrifice, and converts to his faith would suddenly be transformed into ardent and devoted Muslims. Profound in his knowledge of men, he sought out and attracted to his creed the bravest and the most brilliant of his enemies. It is thus that, in so short a time, Islam has been transformed from a petty state in Medina into a mighty empire. Shrewd observers mark in these events the gathering in Arabia of the Sirrocco, the mighty wind of the desert, that will spread Islam, far and wide, into the hearts of the Empires of the Byzantines and the Persians. Already Khalid, crossing the burning sands, has gained against the Greeks one of the most astounding victories that the annals of history make mention. There are others too yearning to conquer Egypt, Persia and Spain, and to carry the banners of Islam to the Pyrenees and

the Indus. This is the enthusiasm that the magic of Muhammad has raised.

It is the end of the journey. He still lies in agony, but the pain is a trifle less. Ayesha has his head in her lap. He is in a trance; but suddenly he comes back to himself, opens his eyes and fixes his gaze towards the door. The Angel of Death stands in the doorway; hesitates; then beckons to him. Muhammad is ready. Softly he is heard to murmur "God be praised."

Ayesha looks down and finds he has passed into eternity.

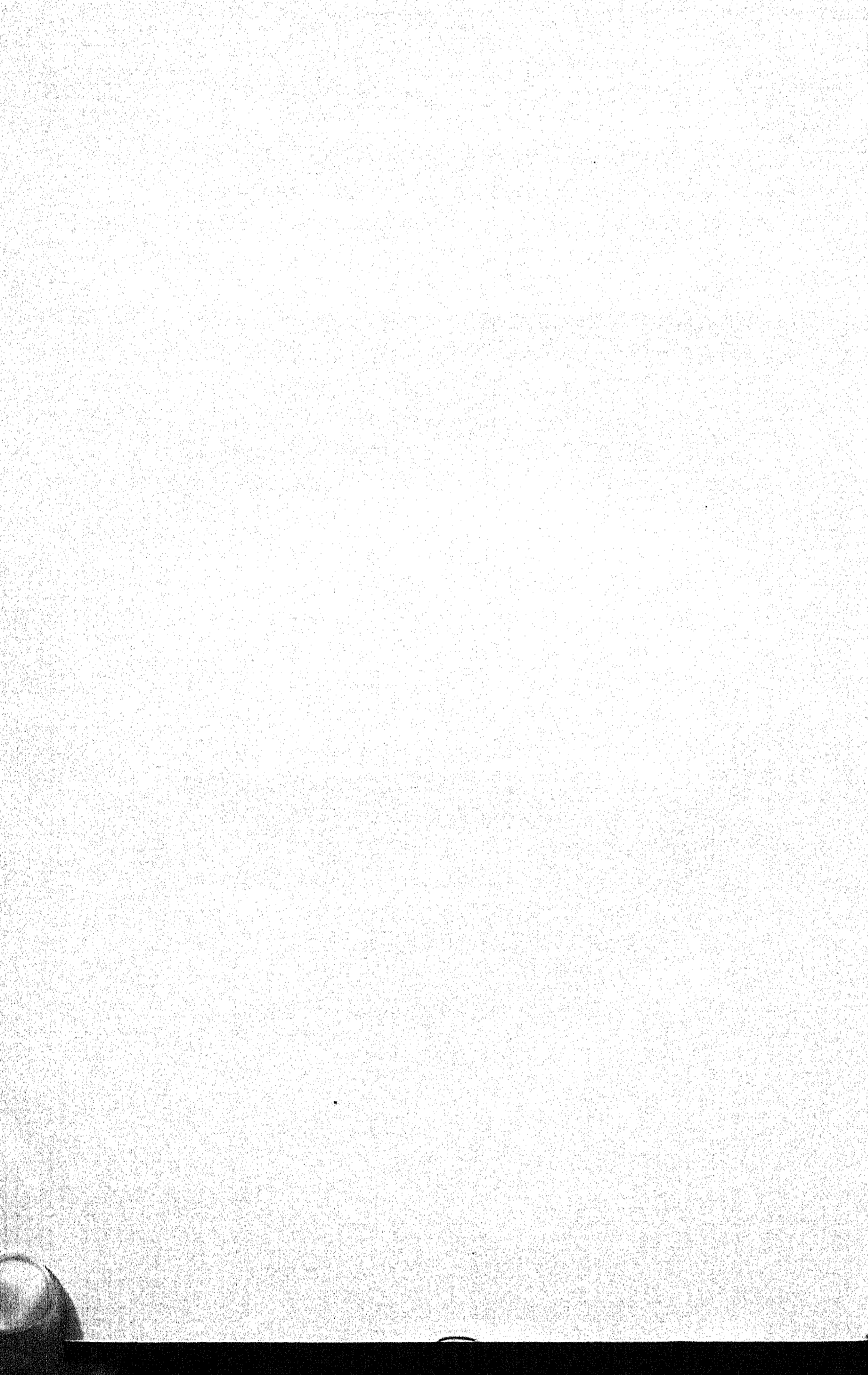
When the news of his death filters through to the city there is consternation. Some are struck dumb; others appear not to be in their right minds. A large multitude is waiting in the mosque for news. Somebody says that Muhammad is dead. Umar is incredulous and ready to strike off the speaker's head. "Muhammad is not dead. He cannot be dead. It is impossible." Abu Bakr has entered the mosque. He walks slowly upto the tribune. All eyes are upon him. Umar looks up at his face painfully. Abu Bakr lifts a hand. There is silence.

In soft measured tones, he tells them: "Muslims, Muhammad is but a man, a Messenger, the like of whom have passed away before him. Can

MAN

it be that if he dies or is slain, you will abandon the Faith that he has given you? Unto Allah belongs whatsoever is in the Heavens and whatsoever is upon the Earth; and unto Allah all things are returned. Muhammad the Apostle of Allah is dead. *Sallallabo-alabi-wa-sallam.*"

THE END



AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In order to enable the reader to reach the subject matter, as speedily as possible, this note on obligations, which should normally precede the text, has been deferred to the end. But the appearance, in an unusual location, of these acknowledgments should not be construed as diminishing, in any manner, the Author's sense of gratitude.

Of the many fountains of learning, from which the writer has drunk deep, particular reference must be made to the brilliant commentary and translation of the "*Holy Quran*" by Maulana Mohammad Ali, President of the Anjuman Ishaat-i-Islam; Syed Ameer Ali's classic "*The Spirit of Islam*"; Maulana Shibli's monumental "*Sirat-un-Nabi*" in three Volumes; "*The Encyclopædia of Religions*"; "*The Encyclopædia of Islam*"; the "*Life of Mohamet*" by Sir William Muir; The "*Ideal Prophet*" by the late Khwaja Kamal-ud-din, many years head of the Woking Mission; "*The Social Laws of the Koran*" by Mr. Robert Roberts; "*The Principles of Mohammadan Jurisprudence*" by Mr. Abdur

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Rahim; M. Gaudefroy-Demombyne's excellent exposition "*Les Institutions Musalmanes*"; M. Savary's equally splendid rendering of the *Koran* in French; the brief but accurate "*Life of the Prophet Muhammad*" by Maulana Mohammad Ali; the valuable articles in the "*Encyclopædia Britannica*," and the informative but biased accounts in the "*Historians' History of the World*".

For the English rendering of passages from the *Koran* the Author has depended largely upon the explanatory translation of Mr. Marmaduke Picthall and the work of Maulana Muhammad Ali on the same subject. As the narrative is based not on any particular account but on the material available in the several reports of Ibn Hisham, Ibn-ul Athir, Tabari and Abul Fida and the *Hadith* collected by Muslim, and Bukharee, it is of course, impossible to expect unanimity of opinion on every incident or expression of opinion, and about which there must always be a measure of diversity.

As the book is more a work of reflection, than a work of research or erudition, it has not been thought necessary to follow, too meticulously, the spelling, inflections of pronunciation and the usual orthodox treatment of

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

oriental names; nor has it been thought necessary, for the same reasons, to burden the book with a comprehensive bibliography or to make reference by footnotes to the Author's sources of information, but chapter and verse can be given for the incidents, sayings and actions of the Prophet. The Author seeks indulgence only for the mode of treatment of the subject and, where history is silent, reasonable reductions from accepted hypotheses.

Finally, the Author is deeply indebted to Maulana Muhammad Ali for perusal of the book in manuscript, for many valuable suggestions and elucidation of points of difficulty. It is, however, fair to add that it is the Author alone who assumes responsibility for the contents of this book. The Author's thanks are also due to M. Fazal Ahmed, M.A. of the Inter-collegiate Muslim Brotherhood of Lahore for careful and painstaking revisions of the proofs and helpful criticism, which has materially contributed to the improvement of the work. For the design of the jacket the Author is grateful to his brother-in-law Mr. Razmi Ahmed of the Government College, Lahore.

Lastly, but by no means the least, thanks are due to the many kind friends, who, for pur-

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

poses of publicity, must remain nameless, but whose constant and appreciative encouragement has made this book possible.

K. G.

Lahore, *November* 23, 1933.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

CHAPTER I

<i>Christian Era</i>	<i>Before Hijra</i>
570 Muhammad Born (29th August), 12th Rabi I	53
575 Returns from the Banu Sad	47
576 Amina, Muhammad's mother, dies	46
578 Abdul Muttalib dies	44
582 A Trader with Abu Talib	40
590 Takes part in the Battle of the Harbal Fijar, on behalf of the Quraish	32
591 Participates in Hilf-ul-Fudzil	31
593 Journeys to Syria for Khadija	29
595 Marries Khadija	27

CHAPTER II

605 Between 595—605 several children born to Muhammad and Khadija	17
Reconstruction of the Ka'ba begun Muhammad cogitating upon the problems of his times.	
610 The first Revelation received on Mount Hira	12

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Christian Era

Before Hijra

Khadija, Zaid and Ali in turn accept
Islam.

Ayesha Born.

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 613 | Ordered to declare his mission publicly
The conversion of Umar. | 9 |
| 616 | The first migration to Abyssinia
Persecution by the Quraish at its height.
Persian conquest of the Near East. | 6 |
| 617 | Ban imposed on the Banu Hashim | 5 |
| 621 | Death of Abu Talib and Khadija | 1 |

CHAPTER III

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 621 | The Mission Ta'if
The First Pledge of Aqaba.
Espouses Ayesha and Sauda. | 1 |
| 622 | Invitation from Yathreb
The <i>Mairaj</i> or Vision.
The FLIGHT = The <i>Hijrat</i> . | 0 |

CHAPTER IV

- | | | |
|-----|--|---|
| 622 | Arrival at Kuba 8th Day of the <i>Hijra</i>
16th Rabi I = 2nd July(?), 28th
June (?) | |
| 623 | Reforms
<i>Suras</i> XXII, VI, II revealed. | |
| 624 | Battle of Badr, 17th Ramadan | 2 |

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

Christian Era

After Hijra

Ayesha enters Muhammad's home.

Marriage of Zainab and Zaid.

Marriage of Ali and Fatima.

Marriage with Hafsa.

Intrigues of the Jews.

- 625 Battle of Uhud, Saturday 11th Shaw-
wal 3

CHAPTER V

- 626 Perfidy of the Jews 4

Campaign against the Banu Qainuqa.

Campaign of Banu Nadzir.

Sura LIX relating to Spoils of War
revealed.

Suras III & IV revealed.

- 627 Campaign against Banu Mustaliq 5

Ayesha loses a necklace.

Divorce of Zaid and Zainab.

Juwairiya and Zainab join the Prophet's
household.

The Battle of Ahzab or of the Moat.

The execution of the Banu Quraiza.

CHAPTER VI

- 628 Pilgrimage to Mecca attempted 6

The Treaty of Hudaibiya.

THE PROPHET OF THE DESERT

Christian Era

After Hijra

- War upon the Jews.
 Khaibar surrenders.
 Marriage with Safiyya.
 629 Invitation to various sovereigns to
 embrace Islam 7
 Khalid abandons his Gods.
 Pilgrimage to Mecca (March) . . . 8
 Battle of Muta.
 Truce of Hudaibiya broken.
 630 Conquest of Mecca.
 Tribes embrace Islam.

CHAPTER VII

- 630 Battle of Hunain and Autas 8
 631 Expedite of Tabuk 9
 Completion of *Sura* 'Al Barath'.
 Year of Deputations to the Prophet.
 632 Prophet's last Pilgrimage 10
 The Death of Ibrahim (Jan. 27th).
 Death of Muhammad the Apostle of
 Allah (June, 7th) 11



